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CHARLES DOWDING

plus

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No. 222 March 2016 £4.99



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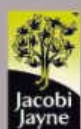
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WELCOME



Steve often multi-tasks on the plot; here he sows lettuce while testing kneelers and, of course, drinking tea!

I always look forward to March. The decision as to whether to sow outside or not may still depend on the vagaries of the UK weather, but sowing inside – on a windowsill or in the greenhouse or polytunnel – can begin this month, and seed sowing is my favourite gardening activity.

Increasingly, we are being encouraged to try new crops – or at least crops which are new to us. While trying new things is undoubtedly great fun, it is easy to get carried away and frustrating if the results don't live up to the hype. So we asked a number of our regular experts for their must-have fruit or veg and also for those which, having tried them once, they certainly won't be growing again. Read their verdicts on page 59.

The KG team put their heads together to bring you their top 101 tips to help you get your season off to the best possible start and as cheaply as possible. We hope you'll agree that they are genuinely useful. If you have any of your own you'd like to share, please drop me a line and we'll feature them in the magazine.

Also this month we have in-depth growing guides for carrots, asparagus, alpine strawberries and rocket, and two great projects turning recycled materials into handsome and useful gardening essentials for your own plot, or for a Mothering Sunday gift.

Steve **Steve Ott, editor**

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YOUR EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE INCLUDE:



BEN VANHEEMS

Organic gardening expert Ben travelled to the Cotswolds for us recently to visit a plotter who loves colour, whether from her veg or allotment blooms, and who is never fazed by gluts – all the more for delicious recipes!



JOYCE RUSSELL

Award-winning practical journalist Joyce puts her talents to good use in this issue as she brings us a simple project to make a lovely rustic garden gate, plus offers her usual seasonal advice on growing under cover.



MARTIN FISH

Gardening expert and broadcaster Martin offers his advice on the top tasks on the plot this month, but also looks at a novel way of increasing your apple stocks by grafting. He has a great idea for a Mother's Day gift, too (see page 25).



ANNA PETTIGREW

Food writer and photographer Anna is our regular contributor on all things culinary. In this issue she has some tempting, yet simple recipes for preparing rhubarb, cauliflower and the first spring onions of the season.



COLIN RANDEL

As a professional horticulturist and member of the RHS Vegetable Trials Forum Colin has his finger on the pulse of all things new in the veg world. Here he brings us the results of the latest trials into beefsteak tomatoes.



EMMA RAWLINGS

Deputy editor Emma has been growing the new raspberry 'Ruby Beauty' and brings you her verdict on page 88. She has also been busy adding her top tips to our feature on page 70 and filming videos for our digital issue.

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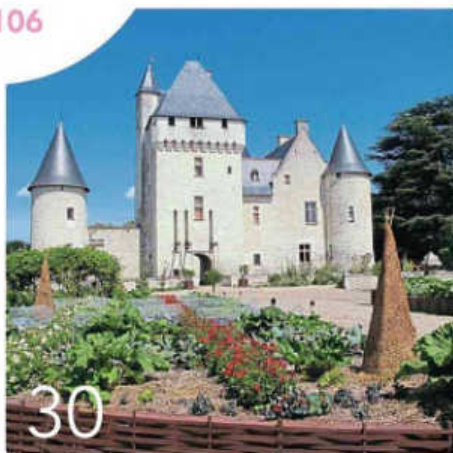
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JOBS *THIS MONTH*



TASKS FOR YOUR PATCH AND UNDER COVER IN MARCH BY MARTIN FISH



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MINUTE JOBS

ORDER SEEDS

The main sowing season will soon be with us so check that you have all the seeds that you need for the growing year. If you haven't, there is still time to order, or you can visit a local garden centre where they usually have a good selection.

EMPTY COMPOST BINS

I like to start the growing season with an empty compost heap or bin ready to hold the garden waste that will be generated over the spring and summer. If you have more than one heap, try to make sure that at least one is empty and ready for action.

FEED SPRING GREENS

Spring cabbages that have been overwintering in the garden will benefit from a high-nitrogen feed to get them growing and producing fresh spring greens. Lightly sprinkle a high-nitrogen fertiliser such as Nitro Chalk or pelleted poultry manure around the plants and work it into the soil.

PREPARE FOR SOWING

In preparation for spring sowing and planting of vegetable seedlings, make sure that your garden string line is untangled and ready to use. If the string is weak, replace with new. If you use a planting board, make sure any graduations of measurements are clearly marked.



PLANT ONION SETS

Before planting onion sets into the garden, rake in some general fertiliser such as Growmore or pelleted poultry manure into the bed to supply nutrients for when the onions are growing. If you have a light, soft soil the small onion sets can be gently pushed into the cultivated soil so that just the tip is visible. On slightly heavier soils a small trowel can be used to plant the bulbs.



SOW LETTUCE IN PLUGS

To keep a regular supply of lettuce through the spring and summer the secret is to sow little and often and a good way to start the plants off is by sowing in plug trays. Sow a selection of lettuce every few weeks and germinate them in a cold frame or under cover at this time of the year. Very soon you will have strong seedlings for transplanting out into the garden.



SOW TOMATO SEEDS

Outdoor tomatoes can be very tasty when grown in a warm, sheltered position, especially if we get a sunny summer! Although it is far too early to plant out, now is the time to start thinking about sowing seeds to raise plants for the garden. Sow the seeds thinly in small pots, cover with a thin layer of compost, water to moisten and germinate them in a warm place indoors.

Top tip

To prevent soil from being trampled around the garden, install a boot scraper, so that when you have finished working on your plots any soil sticking to the bottom of your boots can be removed

ON THE VEG PATCH

GROUND PREPARATION

Before we start sowing seeds and planting out in the vegetable plot we need to prepare the beds to create ideal growing conditions and for the best results the ground work should be done when the surface of the soil is starting to dry off. Soil that has already been dug over needs breaking down to create a seed bed by using a garden rake or



fork to create a level surface and to rake off large stones and debris. The soil can then be firmed by walking over it, a process often referred to as the 'seed bed shuffle'! I then sprinkle a general fertiliser over the area and give a final rake to create a firm, crumbly seed bed.

PLANT EARLY POTATOES

When to plant the first potatoes of the season in the garden will depend on where you live, and it can vary from early March to early April. Before planting, bear in mind the soil should be starting to warm up and remember also that the new growth can easily be damaged by spring frosts. If the ground has been prepared in advance the 'chitted' tubers can easily be planted with a trowel. I plant the tubers about 10cm (4in) deep and around 30-35cm (12-14in) apart. If planting more than one row, space the rows 60cm (2ft) apart to allow plenty of growing room. In good growing conditions from planting to harvesting is around 90 days.



SOW NOW

Carrots, beetroot, leeks, lettuce, broad beans, peas, onions, salad leaves, sprouting seeds, tomatoes in a greenhouse.



PLANT NOW

Shallots, onions, Jerusalem artichokes, garlic from pots, asparagus, early potatoes, fruit trees and bushes, rhubarb and strawberries.



HARVEST

Leeks, parsnips, kale, winter cabbage, chard, spinach, Brussels sprouts.



FROM STORE

Potatoes, carrots, beetroot, apples, onions, shallots.

Do it now

There is still time to plant bare root fruit trees and bushes before they start into growth, but try to get them in the soil as soon as possible and water the roots if the soil is dry.

In mild areas sow some early varieties of carrots such as 'Amsterdam Forcing' or 'Nantes 5' outside under a cloche or frame.



Finish pruning apples and pears this month before the flower and growth buds start to swell and open.

If you are forcing rhubarb under pots, have a sneaky look to see what is happening. Hopefully new shoots should be starting to grow.



Fruit trees that have stakes on them to give support need checking to make sure the ties are firmly secured, but not too tight.

TOP GRAFTING AN OLD APPLE TREE

In my garden I have an old variety of apple tree called 'Bess Pool' that originated in Nottinghamshire in the 1700s. It's a healthy seven-year-old tree, but produces very little fruit because it blossoms late in the season when all the other trees have finished flowering. In order to get fruit I need another variety that flowers at the same time to act as a pollinator. I haven't room for more trees so my plan is to top graft different varieties on to the existing tree to create a family tree. The process of top grafting is fairly easy and is done in spring just as the trees are starting to show signs of growth.

When top grafting an established tree the first thing to do is cut back some of the branches to a framework. It is on the pruned branches that the new varieties will be grafted.

The graft wood, or scion, is cut from last season's shoots from the variety that you want to grow. Ideally, cut these a couple of weeks before grafting as they need to be dormant. Store them in a cool place or fridge until needed. Some specialist fruit nurseries will sell graft wood via the post if you can't find any locally.

Trim the scions to around 10-15cm (4-6in) long and using a very sharp knife cut the base to create a tapered wedge. Then use the knife to cut a slit in the bark on the top of a pruned branch and wiggle the knife to open it up. Push the scion down into the slit so that the cambium layers are in contact. You can insert two or three scions around a thick branch.

Finally, seal the wound by binding with tape. I use electrical insulation tape and then dab the cuts to prevent moisture getting in with grafting wax. Label the varieties and later in spring the top buds on the graft should start to grow and form a new branch that you train to form a new tree.



Inserting scion into bark of tree



The scion is taped to secure and sealed with grafting wax

TIDY STRAWBERRIES

Established strawberry plants growing outside have been dormant over winter, but will soon start to wake up. Before they make a flush of new foliage, give the plants a good tidy up to remove any dead or yellow foliage and also any fallen leaves that have accumulated around the plants. Once you have tidied them up, sprinkle a small amount of general fertiliser around the plants to give them a boost.



Top tip

Before the really busy season of sowing, planting and weeding is upon us, take a little time to sit down and write some labels for the veg plot. It's much easier to do this in advance in a warm, dry house!



POLLINATE PEACH BLOSSOM

Peaches are one of the earliest flowering fruit trees and if the weather is cool, the lack of pollinating insects can result in a poor crop. To help pollination you can use a soft paint brush or rabbit's tail to gently brush over the flowers when fully open to move pollen from one flower to another. It's also a good idea to drape some fleece over the tree on frosty nights to protect the blossom.

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SOW & GROW IN MARCH

■ Sow tomatoes, peppers, melons, cucumbers, basil, courgettes and French beans in a propagator at 20C (68F).

■ Sow French marigolds towards the end of the month. These will help keep whitefly off tomatoes.

■ Sow rocket, kohlrabi, salad leaves, early carrots and spinach directly in drills where they will grow.

WITH
JOYCE
RUSSELL

Pictures by
Ben Russell



IN THE GREENHOUSE



What's right for you?

RAISING PLANTS FROM SEED

- Cheapest option if you want lots of plants
- Is more work, but can be enjoyable
- Gives a wide choice of varieties
- You won't import any pests or diseases
- Can grow extra and choose the healthiest plants to grow on

BUYING IN YOUNG PLANTS

- Cheap option if you only want one or two plants
- Good choice for those with limited time
- Can avoid the need for a propagator
- Limited choice of varieties
- Pests and diseases can be imported on plants
- Buy early or you may be left with the weakest plants

SPRING LETTUCE

Sow short rows of lettuce every month and you will always have a supply of leaves to eat. Plants from January sowings are growing fast and it can be tempting to leave all rows to form large heads, but you are unlikely to eat them all before they bolt. Start picking a few leaves from each plant while they are small and tender. This means you get plenty of tasty young lettuce over several weeks. When plants are finished the next sowing will be ready to pick.

EARTH UP POTATOES

If you planted potatoes in buckets or straight in the border soil, then remember to 'earth up' as the stems grow. This means putting a bit more compost into the bucket or piling earth around the base of stems. Potatoes turn green if they are exposed to light and you want to keep all those early roots buried.



TIPS FOR GETTING CUCUMBERS OFF TO A GOOD START

■ Choose all-female varieties if you want plants that produce reliable bitter-free fruits. The varieties 'Carmen', 'Bella' and 'Tiffany' all grow well in my greenhouse.

■ Sow one seed per 8cm (3in) pot, at 20C (68F) until they germinate. Don't exclude light.

■ The average household only needs two plants that are cropping well, but it's worth sowing three or four in case any fail.

■ Sow in the first half of March if you want plants to start cropping in late May or early June. Sow later, or buy

in plants, if you aren't able to keep large plants above 15C (59F) until May.

■ Err towards dry, rather than soggy, for the compost when plants are in pots. If roots sit in pots of wet compost they are prone to root rot.

■ Keep moving young plants into larger pots before they become root bound. And when they get too big to keep in a propagator, start hardening them off.

■ Cucumbers do really well if grown in a hot bed: this can be as simple as a pile of manure covered with compost. The heat from the rotting manure keeps plants warm and you can throw a cover over the top at night. Or you can make the covered hotbed shown in February KG if you feel inspired.

So, get out to the greenhouse if weather permits, and feel proud of yourself for getting everything ready to grow superb crops in 2016!



TOP TIPS FOR SMALL STRUCTURES

- Ventilation is vital: temperatures fluctuate much faster in a small structure. It's better for the plants to be slightly cool than to be baked.
- Sow little and often and aim for variety rather than lots of one thing: it can help to mark out a bed into growing sections.
- Use the height as much as you can: hanging shelves can use space better than a bench for raising seedlings.

KEEP BUSY

- ✓ Prick out and pot on small plants as needed
- ✓ Open doors and windows on warm days
- ✓ Remove bolting crops
- ✓ Water carefully
- ✓ Feed grape vines and peach trees

PESTS & PROBLEMS

SLUGS AND SNAILS get active as the weather warms up. Protect emerging seedlings and small plants, and go out after dark to pick the beasts off larger leaves. You can dramatically reduce greenhouse populations by removing adults and squashing eggs.

GREENFLY can suddenly appear in large numbers in a mild spring. They can stunt and distort leaves on small pepper plants, which seem to be a favourite. Take potted plants outdoors and squirt the pests off, where they can't climb back up, or use a soap-based spray under the leaves of plants that can't be moved.

DAMPING OFF affects young seedlings. Stems shrivel and seedlings flop. You may not spot this until half a tray of seedlings are lost, at which point it can be hard to save the rest. Dirty pots, contaminated compost, overcrowding and wet, airless growing conditions favour the fungus that is to blame. Avoid these and seedlings should be free of the problem.

BROAD BEANS

Autumn-sown varieties are in flower this month. Clear back any other plants that crowd too close, so plenty of air can circulate and bees can improve pollination on these self-fertile plants. Keep soil damp while the plants are in flower if you want to get the best set of pods. Support tall varieties with sticks and string.



PICK PEAS

First pods may be ready now and it's important to keep picking in order to keep plants cropping. Mangetout peas can be eaten while the pods are flat and juicy. Let peas swell a little on sugar snap varieties, and let them swell fully if peas are to be podded out of their shells.

TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

An asparagus bed is best established outdoors, but in some areas it's just too cold and wet for plants to do well. If you are prepared to dedicate a sunny corner of the greenhouse to this vegetable then it can perform well under cover. Dig manure into the bed and plant crowns on mounds 30cm (12in) apart. Cover with earth and add a little lime if needed to raise pH. Don't let soil become too wet and resist cutting spears in the first year.



Much more on asparagus on page 20

HOT TOPICS

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GROWING YOUR OWN FRUIT AND VEG

WILDFLOWER PESTICIDE COCKTAIL

Scientists at Sussex University have discovered that bees are exposed to a chemical cocktail when feeding from wildflowers growing next to neonicotinoid treated crops in UK farmland. These chemical cocktails could make the impact of neonicotinoids up to 1000 times more potent than previously realised.

One in 10 species of Europe's wild bees is facing extinction, and neonicotinoid insecticides are increasingly seen as contributing to these declines. In addition to neonicotinoids, farmers may spray some non-organic crops a dozen or more times while they are growing, with anything up to 23 different chemicals.

To combat bee decline, the Government's Pollinator Strategy has focused on creating 'safe havens' for bees by increasing flower habitats next to fields – yet this research shows these flowers may be laden with dangerous chemicals.

Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex, and one of the authors of the paper, said: "It is clear that insects visiting wildflowers in field margins are chronically exposed to a cocktail of chemicals. The effects that this has on their health have never been studied, and there is an urgent need to do so. In the meantime, the precautionary principle would suggest that we should take steps to reduce this exposure as much as possible."



A CAREER IN HORTICULTURE?

Squire's Garden Centres have joined forces with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to create a programme to get secondary school children into gardening, and to change their perceptions about a career in horticulture.

The Secondary School Challenge scheme was launched last September and more than 70 children aged 12-15 took part from schools across Surrey, Middlesex and Greater London. The schools had two projects to choose from: Creating a School Garden or Growing Your Community Garden. Each team was allocated a mentor from either Squire's Garden Centres or RHS Wisley to help them plan, develop and design their ideas.

Each school team presented their ideas at a final assessment day in December at RHS Wisley. Prizes were awarded for:

- Best Teamwork – Surbiton High School
- Most Innovative – Notre Dame School, Lingfield



Children from the four winning schools

- Pupil's Choice – Sir William Perkins School, Chertsey
- Best Overall Project – Bishop David Brown School, Woking

The four winning schools were awarded a Raspberry Pi time-lapse photography kit and gardening vouchers, while the children received a selection of carnivorous and cactus plants to take home.

SCOTLAND'S GARDENS 85TH ANNIVERSARY

Scotland's Gardens, a charity which dates back to its inception in 1931, marks its 85th anniversary year with 440 gardens throwing open their gates. During 2016 visitors will be able to wander around coastal gardens, village trails, grand

estates and hidden urban retreats, and gaze on 35 National Plant Collections; 272 charities will benefit from funds raised by the openings.

Terrill Dobson, national organiser for Scotland's Gardens, said: "Scotland has such a varied, beautiful landscape and so there is a garden opening for every taste. Our dedicated volunteers scour the country for undiscovered gardening gems and each year we're always able to bring visitors something new to explore and admire." For more information visit: www.scotlandsgardens.org



DO YOU HAVE SOME HOT STORIES FOR OUR NEWS PAGES? SEND THEM TO TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

NAME THAT SWEET PEA

Mr Fothergill's seed company is looking for a name for a new mixture of sweet peas it is launching to raise funds for the Royal Hospital Chelsea, and is hoping Britain's gardeners will vote for their favourite. The blend of varieties in various shades of red will be launched for the 2016/17 season, with the Royal Hospital receiving 25p for every packet of 20

seeds priced at £1.99 the Suffolk seedsman sells.

Staff at Mr Fothergill's were asked to nominate their favourite names and the top three were 'Lest We Forget', 'Remembrance' and 'Scarlet Tunic'. The company is now asking members of the public and the Chelsea Pensioners themselves to vote for one of these three names.



To cast a vote online, visit Mr Fothergill's on Facebook or Twitter and comment on its posts to state a preference – <https://twitter.com/mrfothergill> or <https://www.facebook.com/MrFothergills>. The closing date for voting is Monday, February 29 and the winning name will be announced by March 15.

com/mrfothergill or <https://www.facebook.com/MrFothergills>. The closing date for voting is Monday, February 29 and the winning name will be announced by March 15.

ROCKET IN SPACE? WHERE ELSE?

Currently, 2kg of rocket seeds are being looked after by British European Space Agency astronaut Tim Peake on the International Space Station. The seeds, which have been held for six months in microgravity, will be returned to Earth in March 2016 and distributed to schools participating in the Rocket Science Experiment, organised by the UK Space Agency in conjunction with the Royal Horticultural Society.



EGG AND CHIPS PLANTS PLEASE!

Following on from the hand-grafted Tomtoato, Thompson & Morgan plant breeders have created a dual-cropping vegetable plant named Egg & Chips. These plants produce aubergines (better known as egg plants in the US and Europe) and potatoes on the same plant. These can be sown outside in a sunny, sheltered spot and, like the Tomtoato, will particularly suit gardeners short on space. T&M are keen to emphasise that there is no genetic modification involved, just an all-natural and safe process.

Orders are now being taken for mail order despatch from April onwards – 1x 9cm potted plant £14.99 or two for £19.99. For more information visit: www.thompson-morgan.com/eggandchips



HOSPICE PLANS FOR PATIENT KITCHEN GARDEN

The Norfolk Hospice, Tapping House is currently in the middle of expanding its patient kitchen garden to enhance the gardening therapy programme.

Dobbies in King's Lynn has donated £1000 towards the project, which meant that Emma Shaw (senior palliative rehab assistant) who runs the gardening therapy programme was able to hand pick a variety of bulbs, flowers and equipment tailored to the needs of the current patients.

The patient kitchen garden faces on to fields which are jam-packed with wildlife. Patients can not only enjoy the gardening aspect but also the nature which accompanies it, thanks to their new bird table.

Mark Shea, commercial director at The Norfolk Hospice, said: "I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone who has supported this project, especially to Dobbies." Any local companies that would like to support the project next year should call the fundraising office on 01485 601701 or email: mark.shea@norfolkhospice.org.uk



Victoria Emden, community champion at Dobbies, Kings Lynn (left) with Emma Shaw (senior palliative rehab assistant) at The Norfolk Hospice




Kitchen Garden

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SLUG PROBLEM? BUILD A MOAT!

Our old English castles with their moats to repel invaders gave me a good veg gardening idea. My local slugs and snails made sure that my vegetable plants never had a chance until I remembered that they cannot swim unless

wearing life jackets.

So out of old plastic trays and a brick or two they became protected by a moat. I have to use the method every year although I did see some slugs practising the long and high jumps recently – or was it

perhaps that they were training for the next Olympics?

Loris Goring, Devon

TONY SAYS: Though I did find this picture of a snail doing the front crawl... what next? Flying pigs?

★ STAR LETTER
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HAVE YOUR SAY

CONTACT US WITH YOUR LETTERS AND TIPS: TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

BANANA STRIPS

This works for all veggies that come from flowers. Tomatoes – when you're ready to make the final transplant, dig the hole, eat a banana and keep the skin; then put the whole skin in the hole and plant the tomato straight on top. For other veggies already in the ground, cut up the banana skins into strips and bury them around your plants; water as normal.

The trick? Bananas are high in potassium and so are their skins. Potassium means flowers and flowers mean veggies.

Jayne Brown, Southsea

TONY: I'm getting mine ready this very moment....



GLOVES OFF, GAUNTLETS ON

Your review of gardening gloves in the February issue of KG needed to look further afield than the usual offerings.

I struggle to keep a two-acre garden in check and have found that the usual gloves available in garden centres simply did not give sufficient protection against nettles, hawthorns and brambles etc. – I always seemed to get stung or thorned, even with the most expensive leather offerings. I needed protection to mid-forearm and the back of the hand. These are where the usual gloves on offer just did not provide sufficient protection. A few years ago my brother-in-law gave me a pair of welding gauntlets for Christmas (he had seen my scratched arms and was thinking laterally as I am not a welder) – an unusual Christmas present, but they were a revelation.

Go to Screwfix and get two or three pairs of their cheapest welding gauntlets



(order code 15601

Price £3.99 per pair) to

scatter about. Doubtless other tool suppliers do similar deals. The bright red colour of this product has the additional benefit that they are difficult to lose. Also they become softer with usage. I give away pairs to struggling neighbours.

John Van de Pette, Hampshire

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Send us your tips and pictures and if your letter is published you will get a £10 Dobies voucher. If you are lucky enough to have yours chosen as our Star Letter you will get a £25 voucher. Your voucher will be sent out with a Dobies catalogue and you can choose to spend your winnings on a fabulous range of seeds,

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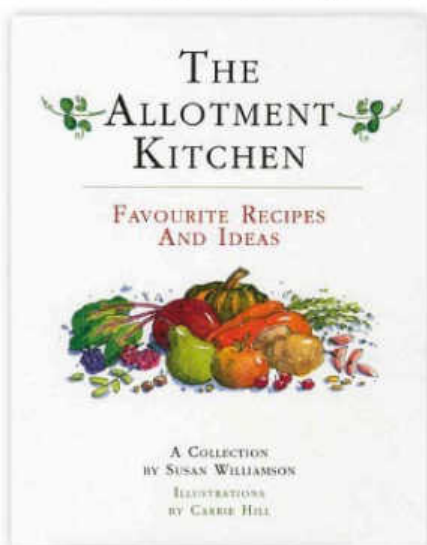


SINGING THE PRAISES

I'm writing to draw your attention to a newly published book called *The Allotment Kitchen* written by Susan Williamson, Serne Arts Publishing. A copy was given to me by a friend who knew I liked to grow and cook some of my own food. I do not have an allotment but I do have a small vegetable patch and a greenhouse.

I've been an enthusiastic reader of *KG* for some years and find the advice it gives invaluable. This book is in similar vein, clean, straightforward text accompanied by delightful coloured drawings. I feel many of your readers who are allotment holders would identify with it and enjoy reading it as much as I have. Keep up the good work, it is much appreciated.

Mrs Noelle Maskey, Ayrshire



LATE PICKINGS

I wonder how many of your readers already apply the method I use to obtain extra-late pickings of tomatoes, without any artificial heat. It's not rocket science – more like the method used to produce early potatoes at Christmas from a mid-summer planting.

Sow just a few seeds (I need only two or three plants) in the last week of May. Treat the seedlings in the usual way and plant out in an unheated greenhouse with slightly increased spacing if possible. The late start and natural vigour of the plants will carry them through well into autumn, when you should start to gradually reduce feeding and avoid over-watering. Provided there is no hard frost and my polycarbonate-roofed greenhouse is



closed down at night, they will normally go on much longer. This year's mild winter gave us perfect specimens not just up to Christmas but even into the new year!

Clearly, not all the later fruit will fully ripen on the plants so as soon as they show a hint of red I pick them and store

them in trays placed in a warm, dark place – sitting on top of our heating boiler seems to suit them fine!

Here down south we now regularly have our own tomatoes for almost six full months – and not a penny spent on heating.

Tony Stone, Oxted

LABEL OF LOVE

I have just read the 'common mistakes' article (February issue). I can certainly relate to the outdoor labelling problem but have recently overcome it. I cut some thin pieces of timber about 1in wide and

15in long and gloss painted letters of the alphabet on one end for labelling rows of vegetables. In a notebook I can then list more information than it is possible to put on a plastic label. So, against each letter I write the type, variety, seed supplier, date of sowing/ planting and the 'sow before

the end of' date. In this way I can always know where to buy the successful seeds and whether it is worth saving part packets for the following year. The labels are reusable.

A similar system using lollipop sticks can be used for pots and trays.

Penny Bailey, Great Yarmouth

ONLINE ★ POST ★ PHONE

Subscribe today ON PAGE 28



TORRENT OF TOMS

The enclosed photo was taken mid-October when we decided to pull these tomatoes and take them indoors to strip them. There were four small green ones, every other one ripe. We picked the first ones early July, only about one a day to eat in the garden, and we picked most days from them as needed. They were eight 'Tumbling Toms' planted in an old strawberry planter in our south-facing front garden. Our first greenhouse toms were late August, and not as sweet and tasty. We have used this method for several years, but blight has usually interfered, whereas this year was blight free.



Sorry this letter is 'out of season', but a spell in hospital got in the way.

Mr D E Saunders,
East Grinstead

SPINACH DELIGHT

My name is Lena and I live in Sweden. I bought your magazine last year when I was visiting England during spring. It was the May issue and I got some free seeds with the magazine. Never thought the spinach seeds would produce as many green leaves as they did! I still have some in the freezer and we love it. Such a joy to eat your own food.

I just wonder if you know what the name of that spinach was? I want to grow this again this year in my garden. I love growing my own vegetables, it's a true joy. Thanks for the seeds and for an inspiring garden magazine!

Lena Jansson, via email

TONY SAYS: The free seeds were of perpetual spinach. I've been growing it too. I love it, and so do the guinea pigs!



Kitchen Garden

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FROM THE FORUM

CAN RUNNERS STAY PUT?



ELEN: I know about crop rotation for various reasons but recently I was told that runner beans were okay to plant in the same patch on the plot each year. What do you think?

MOTHERWOMAN: Heligan Gardens in Cornwall keep runners in the same place as part of their design but they dress the ground heavily in winter, in their case with seaweed. I can't think of any disease in runners that would build up over time; anyone else think of anything?

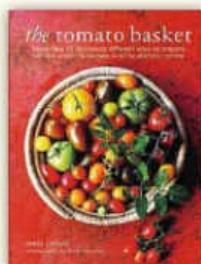
DAN3008: My parents don't have the room to rotate their crops. They literally have a greenhouse and a runner bean row, and that's all the room they have; 15 years and counting with no issues. Fertilise the soil well, and mulch it (or dig a trench and fill it with kitchen scraps) and you should be fine in my experience.

BERYL: My runner bean frame is permanent so I grow them in the same place every year but I do leave the roots in over winter for the nitrogen and add a good layer of well-rotted compost on top, and again in the spring, turning it all in before I plant. Never had any problems so far after more than 10 years.

To have your say on the forum visit:
www.kitchengarden.co.uk/forum

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE COMPETITION

This month the winner of our competition will receive a copy of *The Tomato Basket* by Jenny Linford, worth £14.99. This tastefully illustrated book contains more than 75 different tomato recipes.



HOW TO ENTER: Compare pictures A and B. See if you can spot at least 10 differences. Identify these on picture B with a circle. Complete the coupon below and return your entry by Friday, March 4, 2016. The first correct entry drawn after the closing date will win our prize.



Please enter your details below:

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Please return your entries by post to Kitchen Garden, Spot the Difference (March 2016), Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LZ.



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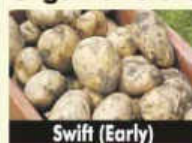
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QUESTION TIME

GOT A FRUIT OR VEG PROBLEM? ASK KG FOR HELP



WITH

**BOB FLOWERDEW &
ANNE SWITHINBANK**

KG EXPERTS & REGULAR
CONTRIBUTORS TO
RADIO 4'S GARDENERS'
QUESTION TIME

FRUITY BEAUTY

I bought a dwarf raspberry 'Ruby Beauty'. It cropped quite well last year but I'm unsure how to care for it. Does it need pruning like summer raspberries or just cutting down like the autumn variety? It is growing in a large pot at present.

Shiv Panchalingam, via email

BOB SAYS: This is a newish dwarf (three foot) variety designed to be pot grown. It's quite productive when well fed and watered, will suffer if under-watered, and will be happier if moved into a big tub rather than kept in a large pot. The old spent canes can be removed once fruited, leaving new canes to replace them. These are not supposed to need thinning but a judicious thin is sensible as plants that are congested with much soft growth make the berries more prone to rot in wet years. These new 'patio' sorts are excellent for early crops under cover – bring the plants into a cool light place during late winter and they will crop a month or more earlier (and be safe from the birds) and can then go back out once finished. (Raspberries must be kept cool under cover, not getting hot and dry or they will become infested by red spider mite; too dank and dark and they may suffer grey mould.)

■ See page 88 for KG's verdict on 'Ruby Beauty'



CELERY TOUGH TO GROW

My family and I love celery, but despite trying to grow it every year I always fail, at best only producing weak, poor heads that look nothing like I see in the supermarkets, or at the local show. Any top tips for success? I do try to give it plenty of water in the summer, but that isn't always easy as my soil is quite free draining.

*Stephen Cale,
via email*

BOB SAYS: Celery is one of the hardest crops to grow well, indeed it is nigh on impossible to produce heads as good as the commercial ones without a great deal of effort. First, it needs starting in the warm, early in spring or even late winter. I use wet sowing compost in a tray then thin early. The plants are soon moved up to small pots and kept wet and well fed until planted out in early summer after hardening off. I plant them in trenches and protected by tube cloches (cut from drinks bottles). The trenches were enriched with well-rotted manure

and kept wetted constantly with water and liquid feed. Mine is also a light soil and a heavy clay would be preferable. You cannot over-water or over-feed! Self blanching sorts do not really whiten and are better blanched, so I prefer older white sorts that need blanching anyway. I have grown celery in large pots and tubs for show specimens but this is even more work for just a few heads. I usually now sow celery seed densely and direct, to produce 'leaf' crops for the flavour and buy celery when I want them fresh.

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Growing through a polythene membrane can save a lot of work

HEAL AS YOU GROW

I am being referred for a hip replacement operation in the very near future. I am therefore looking for advice on low-maintenance crops, growing through polythene membranes etc., and other ideas to make the year ahead more manageable (both pre and post operation) on my allotment. I have first and second early potatoes planned for one large bed, and nothing else yet decided on. The small greenhouse will be invaluable, of course, and my comfy chair is already in place!

Colin Smith, via email

BOB SAYS: A year will seem long, but then be careful not to overdo it. Friends I know with hip operations have rebounded

with incredible enthusiasm once it's done. You are quite right to use membranes to grow through, saves a lot of work. I would invest in the woven black sort that is more expensive but gives decades of use. Cover the entire allotment with this. (In future years you can put it down again in mid-winter over green manures to give lovely clean soil to sow in spring.) This year you can grow through holes cut in it but I counsel against potatoes because of the digging up required. I suggest you grow courgettes, squashes and ridge cucumbers, and bush (left to ramble) tomatoes. I would plan no more than these, and then I'd leave the fabric down once all is harvested until you are ready to get going again. And get yourself a whole stack of gardening books so you really can take it easy while you heal!

PICK OF THE PEPPERS

Can you recommend any small fruited sweet peppers? I see a lot of small fruited chilli types but would like to grow a plant that produces a lot of small fruits which are very mild in flavour. Can you recommend any varieties to look out for?

Peter Rogers, Cornwall

ANNE SAYS: There are quite a few slim, long varieties such as 'Antohi Romanian' (Simpsons Seeds) but at 10cm (4in) long and 5cm (2in) wide they aren't particularly small. There's a good variation in the sweet-flavoured fruits, from pale yellow to bright red. Try 'Mini Bell Red'

(Victoriana Nursery) – compact plants with good toleration of cooler weather conditions which produce a prolific crop of fruits 4-5cm (1-2in) in diameter, maturing to red; or 'Snackbite Mixed' from Suttons Seeds for lots of 7cm (3in) brightly coloured fruits bred for kids' lunch boxes. If a very mild flavour is required, you might get on with a completely different fruit from the cucumber tribe. Achocha is a South American climber happy to perform well outdoors in the UK climate. They vary slightly and I got my seeds from a Seedy Sunday event. These proved easy to grow and when cooked, did taste like mild green peppers (The Real Seed Company).



'Snackbite Mixed' available from Suttons Seeds

GROWING BY THE SEA

We bought a holiday chalet near the sea last year and this year I'd like to plant up some fruit bushes and small fruit trees. It's fairly sheltered and sunny at the front, partial shade at the back. Can you recommend anything please?

Sarah Palmer, Lincolnshire

ANNE SAYS: The major drawback here lies in not being around on a permanent basis to water young plants while they are establishing. An early autumn planting as soon as the soil moistens after summer might be the best time so they can put down roots before drier spring and summer weather. You can buy watering bags for young trees to fill before you go home and they'll seep water around the plants. Dressings of products containing mycorrhizal fungi will also help extend root systems for better uptake of water and minerals. Near the coast, wind

could be a problem, so I'd plant anything in a windier position in spring, so roots can anchor before winter winds. You are aiming for a small forest garden of edible plants, so understanding the microclimates of this small plot will be crucial. Figs will thrive in hot, sunny spots but do restrict their roots beneath the ground so they are fruitful rather than leafy. Against a sunny wall or fence, you might get away with an apricot such as 'Tomcot' or 'Flavorcot' with honeyberry growing underneath. On the shadier side, gooseberries, black, red and white currants will grow. You might be tempted by apples on dwarfing rootstocks but remember their roots may not be vigorous enough to cope with absence and possibly lack of shelter. Upright cordons on semi-dwarfing stock secured to strong stakes and summer pruned would be a better option and you'll be able to fit several varieties in a small space for pollination and set.



Redcurrants can be grown in shadier spots

GET GROWING

CREATE AN ASPARAGUS BED

Freshly picked home-grown asparagus is delicious. Charles Dowding gives advice on growing this high-value crop



Two-month-old asparagus seedlings in April

A native of Mediterranean climates, asparagus gives best growth in warm conditions, with its roots in fertile and free-draining soil. Avoid sites where late frost is common, grow in raised beds if soil is dense clay, and add lime if the soil is on the acidic side (pH below 6.5).

As well as its great flavour, asparagus offers meals during the hungry gap when there are few other fresh green vegetables. If you have the space, grow at least 10 plants for worthwhile amounts to eat, which may amount to 25 spears per plant, through May and June mostly.

PREPARING THE GROUND

Clearing soil of any perennial weeds is top priority – you must be clear of couch grass for example as otherwise it is difficult to control once asparagus is growing. The classic approach is digging and root removal but you are unlikely to find all roots in one pass. It saves your time to mulch untilled, weedy soil with compost and polythene too, until no more weeds are appearing.

Whichever method you choose, where couch grass or bindweed or other vigorous perennial weeds are established, I would spend a year cleaning soil before planting, either with cultivations or mulching. Meanwhile you can save money by raising your own plants from seed, while weeds are being eliminated.

If there are no perennial weeds, simple hand weeding or turning the soil will make ready for planting, then a mulch of well-decomposed organic matter gives great results, topped up annually.

SOWING SEEDS

Growing from seed, especially of all male varieties, is cheaper than buying crowns but takes up to a year longer before picking. There are fewer losses at planting time than the 10% of crowns which can fail and leave gaps in the row. Also seedlings in pots are easier to plant than crowns.

Sow February to April undercover, in modules direct or in seed trays to prick out. After a



Charles mulches newly planted asparagus beds with compost

month seedlings can go into 9cm (3½in) pots for another two months, and are ready to plant in the summer, or pot on and plant in autumn.

PLANTING CROWNS

Crowns are offered for sale from November but are traditionally planted in March/early April and I find this the best time. Scrape off the top 7-10cm (3-4in) of soil in a convex shape, higher in the centre, and place crowns with their roots spread in all directions, then recover with soil. Best growth is in warmer, drier conditions near the surface so avoid planting too deep, then spread 3-5cm (1-2in) compost on top, which can also be decomposed animal manure. This

feeds the plants and makes weeding easier. Should you fancy growing the more difficult white asparagus, plant crowns at 20cm (8in).

SPACING

Asparagus likes a long root run so 45cm (18in) between plants is the minimum, with a 75cm (30in) path or edge. Planting at 60cm (24in) gives healthier plants after 10-12 years, with crowns increasing in size every year. Because of this you will notice less summer growth on other vegetables that are close to the bed of tall ferns, especially in dry summers.

CARE IN FIRST YEAR OF PLANTING

Staying on top of weeds is the main priority and this is easier if you prepared thoroughly. After midsummer or when stems reach 1.2m (4ft) high, it's worth tying the stems of each plant to a stout cane, unless your plot is very sheltered. Foliage dies back by November, then cut stems to 5cm (2in) above ground level and remove to compost/recycle, and mulch with an inch or so of compost, and in every succeeding year.

CARE IN YEAR TWO AND SUPPORTS

Hoe any emerging weed seedlings until about mid-April, but hand weed around the crowns. There is still no harvest to take and by late May you should have strong growth of ferns up to 2m (6ft 6in) high, so staking is almost certainly needed. For example you can run a wire around the bed to keep ferns from falling over. Continue removing any small weeds you see, to prevent any from seeding, or perennial weeds from establishing. ➤

VARIETIES

Choose carefully because they are growing for a long time. I recommend avoiding the old open-pollinated varieties, whose half-male and half-female plants produce fewer spears because females put energy into berries for seed – which then grow as weeds and need removing.

All-male hybrid varieties produce up to three times more spears. A variation is purple varieties which have 25% more sugars, look great and taste good raw, but are less productive and need extra support in windy locations.

■ **'CONNOVER'S COLOSSAL'**: Crops well but grows some plants with thin spears, and half will bear berries by autumn. (not hybrid)

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■ **'PACIFIC PURPLE'**: High yielding in rich soil, 'Stewart's Purple' less so. (all male)



In the Kitchen

■ Raw spears have good flavour and texture so chopping into salads of spring vegetables is one option. To cook, simply place spears in a wide, shallow pan of boiling water for no longer than two minutes, then they are bright green and still firm. A little butter is the classic addition for a quick, simple yet exotic meal.

■ Cooked asparagus is good chopped into pasta, or into a salad of new potatoes with broad beans or peas, and dressed with egg mayonnaise.

■ If you have a glut, spears can be stored with good flavour by blanching briefly, then chilling in ice before freezing.

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Make a GARDEN TRUG

Sometimes overlooked by gardeners, the trug is a really useful piece of equipment. It can be expensive to buy too, so why not make one? Gardening expert, writer and broadcaster Martin Fish shows you how

A garden trug is a really handy piece of kit for your vegetable plot or allotment and they can be bought in many different shapes, sizes and styles, from colourful modern plastic to traditional designs. Costs vary greatly and some of the traditional, hand-made trugs can cost up to £60 while even simple wooden trugs can be around the £30-£40 mark.

Trugs have been used for generations and the name is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'trog', meaning wooden vessel.

Traditionally, trugs were used to measure grain and liquids, but they soon became a useful tool for market gardeners and growers who used them to harvest fruit, vegetable and flower crops from the land or greenhouses. They were widely used up to the 1940s, but as machinery was developed to harvest vegetables, less manual labour was needed and the trug went into decline and was used less and less by commercial growers.

The design of trugs varies around the country and they are often made from local material such as hazel, willow or sweet chestnut.

Probably the most well-known style of trug is the Sussex trug that has been around for a couple of hundred years.

Nowadays trugs are mainly used in the garden and they are ideal for carrying hand tools, young plants and seedlings, seed packets and of course for when you are picking and harvesting crops from the garden.

With Mothering Sunday just around the corner, a home-made wooden trug would make an ideal gift, especially if you filled it with a selection of gardening goodies. By making your own trug you can adapt the shape and size to suit your needs and decorate it in any colour your mum would like!

To make a simple wooden trug for the garden is quite easy and inexpensive. In fact if you can get hold of an old wooden pallet, the wooden boards are ideal for making a rustic garden trug and won't cost anything at all.

All you have to do is carefully take the pallet apart, making sure you remove all of the old nails. From a pallet you can get enough boards to make a couple of trugs, depending on how big you make them.

If you can't get hold of an old pallet don't worry, all you need is some wooden boards from a DIY centre which will only cost a few pounds. ➤



ABOVE: A wooden pallet is ideal for a source of wood for your trug



RIGHT: Dismantle the wood pallet

GARDEN TRUG MATERIALS

If using a pallet the board sizes may vary and with new timber the dimensions may be slightly different. As a guide, my trug is based on the following measurements.

- 1 x base board
@ 50cm x 15cm x 1.5cm thick.
- 2 x sides boards
@ 50cm x 12cm x 1.5cm thick.
- 2 x end boards
@ 25cm x 15cm x 1.5cm thick.
- 1 x handle –
about 48cm x 3cm diameter.
- 16 x 5cm wood screws.
- Paint or wood stain of your choice.



TOOLS REQUIRED

You will need a few basic woodworking tools to make the trug: wood saw, claw-hammer, set square, tape measure and pencil, drill and screwdriver bit, sandpaper.

A vice or workbench is also very handy to hold the base firm when fixing the side boards to it. If using an old pallet you may also need a chisel or crowbar to dismantle it.



Top tips

- On new or reclaimed timber it is always best to pre-drill all the holes before screwing the boards together to prevent the wood from splitting.
- Avoid using boards any thicker than 1.5cm, otherwise the trug will look bulky and be heavy!

STEP BY STEP

MAKE A GARDEN TRUG

STEP 1: Measure the wooden boards to the required length and use a set square to make sure the cuts are square.

STEP 2: Fix the side boards to the base, by pre-drilling a pilot hole and then screwing firmly together.

STEP 3: Using a pencil, mark the angle of the end boards and the height position of the handle.

STEP 4: Use the wood saw to cut the end boards to the correct shape, taking care to get an even and straight cut.

STEP 5: Mark the centre of the handle at the top of the end board and drill a small pilot hole ready for fixing.

STEP 6: Position the shaped end boards between the sides and then drill and screw them into place.

STEP 7: Measure accurately the distance between the tops of the end boards and cut the dowel handle to length.

STEP 8: Fix the handle into place by screwing from the outside of the board through the pilot hole into the end of the dowel.

STEP 9: Give the assembled trug a really good sand down to make sure the boards are smooth with no sharp edges.

STEP 10: Finish off the trug by painting or staining it the colour of your choice. For best results give two coats.





6



7



8



10



9



A great Mother's Day present,
especially when filled with goodies

Top tips

- If using a pallet and the wood is wet, after dismantling allow the boards time to dry out undercover for several days. This will make the wood easier to saw and also reduce any shrinkage once the trug has been made.
- If the finished trug is going to live outside, drill a few holes in the base to allow water to drain out.
- If buying new wood to make your trug, consider buying pressure-treated timber so that it will last for many years.
- A length of old curtain pole is perfect for the handle, or you could use a length of square timber with the corners sanded down.

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GET GROWING

VEGETABLE



FAIRYLAND

at Le Rivau

Naomi Slade visits the Loire Valley in France and enjoys a trip to a chateau with a delightful kitchen garden



Picture:
Chris Wiaznik



Near Chinon to the west of Tours in the Loire Valley, Chateau du Rivau could have stepped straight out of a fairytale. It has gleaming white walls, a mediaeval drawbridge and turrets that would make a Disney princess weep; it is surrounded by trees and flowers, butterflies and bees.

Yet when Patricia and Eric Laigneau bought it in 1992, the castle and buildings were dilapidated and the gardens undeveloped. There was much to do, but with the restoration project under way, Patricia turned her attention to the gardens. Drawing inspiration from the fantastic and fabulous of legend and by the romance of the castle itself, she set out to create something that was fitting both of the place and of the region. Little by little, she began to install inventive planting combinations and scented roses, she created a fairy garden and an enchanted forest and liberally adorned her domain with modern art.

FOOD FOR THE WORKFORCE

In front of the castle, the courtyard is now transformed into an organic potager. "In mediaeval times there was nothing here but a quarry for the castle and the servants' quarters," explains Patricia. "And later it was used as a farm. When we bought it, there was no aesthetic, just old tractors and old machinery.

"I thought of having a kitchen garden here because in the old days all the people working for the lord were housed in the barns. The concept comes from the idea that if these people were working then they must eat!"

Around the courtyard, fig trees climb the walls and grape vines are trained up tall metal 'umbrellas' to create a canopy of leaves and dangling fruit. Packed with veg, the large raised beds and containers are made of woven metal strips, echoing the traditional wicker but more durable.

In the main garden, the orchard is planted with old French varieties such as La Pomme 'D'Api Noir', a small apple that becomes very dark, almost black as it ripens; La Pomme 'Pepin de Bougeuil', ideal for pies and 'Court Pendu' with a very short



Roses act as an early warning system against powdery mildew for the vines

stem. There are also several medlar trees which Patricia loves for the form and structure.

Patricia's choice of plants has strong regional influences. The chateau is near the birthplace of Francois Rabelais, a French renaissance monk, physician, satirist and writer of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in which the eponymous giants enjoy an extravagant and merry lifestyle.

"Rabelais sermonised tolerance and wrote that people should care for each other, for plants and for good food. He said that appetite comes when you are eating and thirst disappears when you are drinking. Rabelais was very fond of eating and drinking and the good life!

"The garden has links with his literature. In *Gargantua's* Vegetable Garden I grow plants that become giants – rhubarb, cabbages, pumpkins. And artichokes: it is said that Rabelais brought back artichokes from Italy in the 16th century." ➤



Patricia Laigneau uses a lot of local heritage varieties in the garden

Vines are trained up huge metal 'umbrellas'





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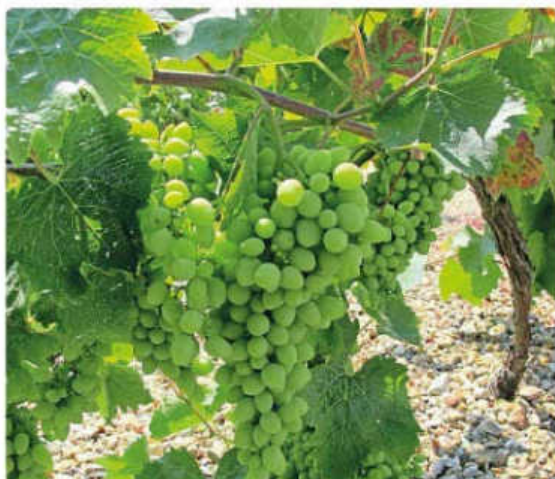
ABOVE LEFT: The leaves of red chard seem to glow in the sunlight

LEFT: Pumpkins and cosmos make good bedfellows



BELOW LEFT: Many heritage varieties of grapes find a home here

BOTTOM LEFT: Figs ripen against the warm castle walls



HERITAGE HAVEN

Among the cabbages and chard is a selection of regional heritage vegetables including squashes 'De Touraine' and 'Sucrine du Berry', melon 'Sucrin de Tours' and beans 'Barangeonnier' and 'Comtesse de Chambord'. There are also turnips 'Globe Saint Benoit' and 'Globe de Saint Marc'. The aim is to preserve the gene pool and introduce the public to old varieties. There are also short rows of old-variety grapes, both red and white, with a rosebush at each end. This is the traditional early warning system for fungal diseases such as mildew, whereby the rose succumbs first like a kind of floral canary, providing the chance to treat the vines before they are spoiled.

To beat pests in the intensively managed organic potager they practice companionage – companion planting. "Companionage attracts the bugs that might bother the plants and they also attract pollinators. Nasturtiums attract bugs and I also grow dahlias, it is a simple flower with an open heart, so it attracts more bees than a composite flower," says Patricia.

But the greatest risk to the vast veg is not drought or insects but birds and, as gardener Michel Chapelain lifts the protective nets for the photographs, Patricia is clearly



keen to leave the vegetables vulnerable for as short a time as possible. "The pesky peacocks, they have good eyes and will eat every leaf!" she exclaims, exasperated. "They can see so well it is amazing!"

Despite the summer fullness, the only perennial crop in the raised beds is the rhubarb. "We start the season with salads for the restaurant and then plant cabbages in the gaps," explains Patricia. "We plant most of the vegetables at the beginning of May and the rhubarb is good as otherwise there is not much to see in April." The microclimate in the courtyard gets the pumpkins off to a blistering start. "We have to prune the cucurbits very often, every week. The idea is to keep pollinated fruit just three to a plant otherwise they won't get as big. Of course they need much water, too. It is very warm here so they grow very fast."

RAISING VEG

"In the courtyard it is nicer to have raised beds, the keep of the castle is very high and as the planting is elevated you can see the whole thing in a glance on entry," explains Patricia. "For me the kitchen garden in September is like a feast table with the teepees representing chandeliers of small, climbing pumpkins!"

The garden is on the same limestone ground that yielded the white walls of the castle and it is strongly alkaline. To neutralise it somewhat, Patricia and her garden team of four make leaf mould from the trees on site to spread across the borders and roses. They also liberally manure the veg patch in January, before letting it rest for two to three months.

Truffles, however, love the chalky soil and following the storms of 1999 a truffle woodland was planted at the far side of the garden. But it is not quite as simple as putting in an inoculated tree and sitting back to wait for black gold.

"You must water the ground well in the month of August or the truffles won't initiate. You can tell where there are truffles as the grass browns, it is called 'brûlée'," she says, indicating the burnt-looking patches under several of the trees. The trees too, require a little management. "You prune them into an inverse triangle, narrow at the bottom and wide at the top so that the sun can hit the ground. These were planted in 2000 but the trees don't get as big (as they otherwise would) as they are also feeding the fungus." ➤

Patricia has been responsible for completely replanting the gardens at Le Rivau





"I think gardening is something that can re-enchant life"



Giant wellies in the orchard

HUMOROUS GARDEN ART

But there are some elements to the garden that are decidedly quirky. In the middle of the potager a giant mole emerges blinking into the light while in the orchard stands a vast pair of wellies.

"I like humour. I am also very fond of art," explains Patricia. "I think gardening is something that can re-enchant life. Many people are in a gloomy mind, because of bad politicians, bankruptcies, aeroplane crashes. For me gardening is a good answer to that bad attitude. And to attract people we must have humour."

The mole is also a reference to the 15th century underground passages that are said to link Chateau du Rivau to Chinon, seven kilometres away. "The tunnels still exist but they are very damaged," she continues. "I need smiles from our visitors and it puts a smile on their face as soon as they arrive. It is like a welcoming mascot, a mix of history and humour!"

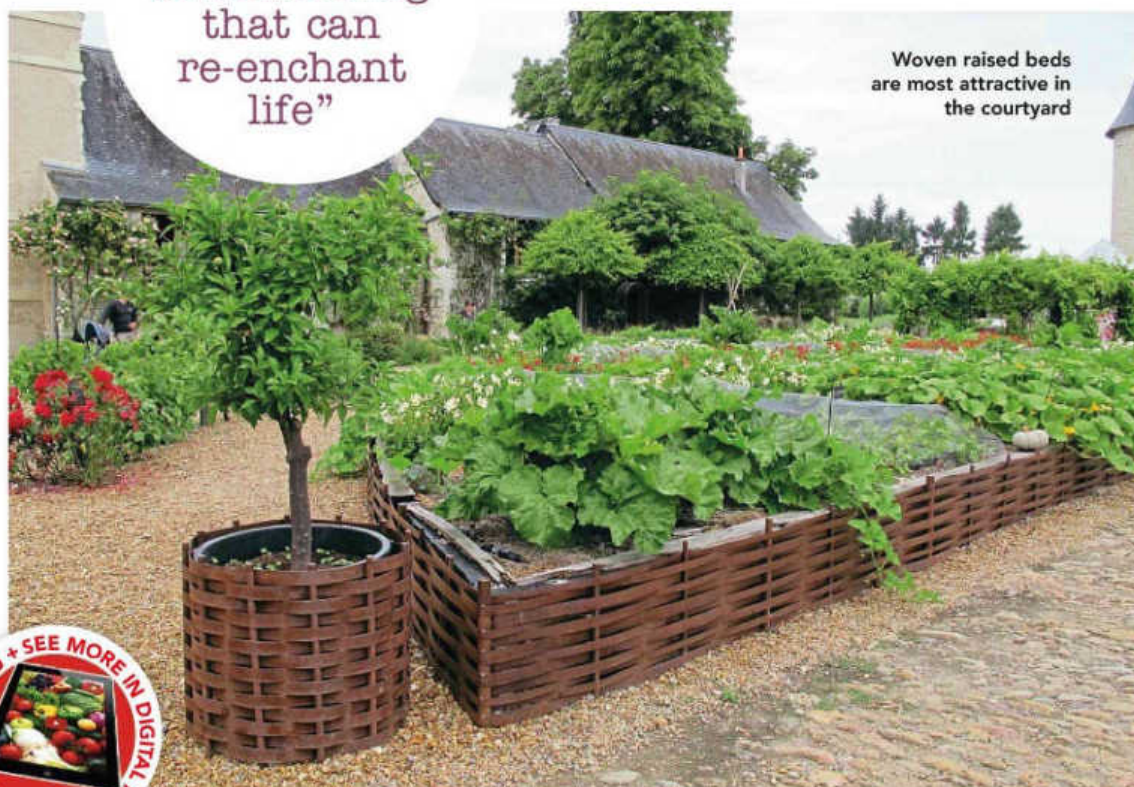
The garden at Le Rivau is imaginative and confident, creating an experience that is fresh, thought-provoking and ever so slightly bonkers. As Patricia had originally intended, it is every bit in keeping with the setting and she has achieved a fairly complex feat: referencing historical elements, conservation and gastronomy yet still creating a garden with a modern twist.

It has an almost intangible quality, bringing together a nobility of intention, a sense of fun and a wealth of symbolism and conservation ideals, underpinned with the poetic notion of a gleaming castle nestled in a jewel-box of greenery. As a Jardin Remarquable – a remarkable garden – Le Rivau certainly deserves its classification. ■

MORE INFO

■ Le château du Rivau, Le Coudray, 37120 Léré, France www.loire-castle-rivau.com

■ The garden is open to visitors and there are three annual events; the garden festival on the first weekend of June, jousting on the second weekend of August and the pumpkin festival on the second Sunday in September, with pumpkin carving workshops for English-speaking children in the October holidays.



Woven raised beds are most attractive in the courtyard

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GET GROWING

Back to basics *with* CARROTS

Round, stump, intermediate or long, carrots are one of our most popular and colourful veg, but growing them isn't always straightforward. KG editor Steve Ott offers some top tips for success



Sow as soon as the soil is warm enough

TOP TIP

Seed packets often advise sowing from February onwards, but this is a risk unless you garden on sandy, free-draining soil. On heavier or water-logged soils it is better to wait another month or two to give the crop the best chance of success

Carrots are a traditional favourite and most of us aim to grow at least a few rows each year, yet many gardeners struggle a little, at least at their first few attempts, to produce those long, straight supermarket-type roots.

SITE AND SOIL

Although not particularly fussy when it comes to growing requirements, carrots do have some basic needs that have to be met if they are to give good results.

The soil needs to be reasonably well drained and fertile. For the longest straight roots the topsoil also needs to be reasonably deep with no hard layers (pans) just below the surface. Excessively stony soil can also lead to difficulties, causing the roots to fork or bend to find a way around obstructions.

A sheltered site is an advantage for early sowings and frost pockets (areas at the bottom of slopes where cold air collects) should be avoided.

It is possible to overcome many of these problems however by growing in raised beds or containers or by choosing the right varieties – for example, round-rooted varieties in shallow or very stony soils.

PREPARATION

As mentioned the soil does need to be reasonably fertile, but too

much fertiliser, for example ground which has been recently manured, can lead to forked roots or lush top growth at the expense of those lovely crunchy roots. For this reason root crops, including carrots, are best grown together as part of a crop rotation usually following those which do like lots of manure and are good at using up excess nitrogen, such as brassicas or leafy salads.

Having dug the soil over to a reasonable depth during the winter and removed the roots of any perennial weeds, all that remains to do in spring is to rake down to a fine tilth and remove any big stones; little ones are fine since they aid drainage. At the same time incorporate 56g (2oz) per sq yd of a general fertiliser such as Growmore, pelleted chicken or sheep manure a week prior to sowing.

SOWING

Always use fresh carrot seed. Once the soil has settled sow thinly 1cm (½in) deep in straight rows about 15cm (6in) apart, before covering with fine soil or alternatively with a little potting compost sieved over the top. The latter can help improve germination if this

Top tips for using seed tape

Avoid sowing on windy days! Water the drill prior to positioning the tape; the paper will absorb the water and stick to the soil, helping to prevent it from blowing away before you can cover it up. Water regularly to help the paper to biodegrade and to allow the seedlings to break through.



Seed tapes remove the need for thinning

tends to be poor, but will dry out more quickly than soil. Sow sparingly; you want to avoid the need for thinning if at all possible (see carrot fly on next page).

Carrot seeds are fairly small so if you struggle to sow thinly you could instead opt for seed tapes; these consist of two strips of biodegradable paper between which pre-spaced seeds have been sandwiched. The tape is simply run out along the length of the drill in place of loose-packed seeds and cut off at the desired length before covering with soil. This can virtually eliminate the need for thinning at all.

Rather than sow long rows, if you prefer you can sow in succession, a short row every two or three weeks for continued cropping. ➤

TOP TIP

Do not be tempted to sow early crops until the soil has warmed sufficiently. Wait if it is below 7C (45F) when checked with a soil thermometer, or if conditions are very wet

CARROTS
AT A GLANCE



SOW

February – August



HARVEST

Mid-May – December

WINTER STORAGE

If you intend to lift your crop for winter use, this is best done once growth slows and the foliage starts to yellow in late summer/early autumn. Lift crop (see p42), wash the roots to remove most of the soil and allow to dry before storing in trays of dry sand, peat or in hessian sacks. In all cases keep the roots cool, dark and out of the reach of vermin.



Store roots over winter in boxes of dry sand or peat

AFTERCARE

Once your seeds are sown, watered in and labelled clearly, cover with cloches or fleece (early sowings) or if sowing after the middle of April crop protection fleece such as Enviromesh or Micromesh. This can be used to form a barrier around the crop to defend against low-flying carrot flies or better still used to completely cover the crop throughout its life. The latter will help to keep off carrot-willow aphids which can be very damaging.

Any coverings will have to be removed periodically to allow weeding; hoe the rows regularly to remove weed seedlings and to break up any hard layers that may form over the surface, thus preventing water from seeping through freely. You will though have to hand weed close to and in between the seedlings so as not to cause disturbance and accidental damage. Cover back up again immediately, but keep the

covering loose so that the plants can push it up out of the way as they grow.

Once the seedlings have germinated and especially if covered with cloches, water regularly during dry spells and as soon as they have developed their first true leaf consider thinning. If you leave them for too long you may disturb neighbouring seedlings as you extract the roots. Concentrate on any little clumps of seedlings and aim to leave an inch or so between plants. You can always thin again if necessary to leave a final spacing of 5-7.5cm (2-3in). Any thinning should be kept to a minimum but where necessary do it in the evening and dispose of the thinnings well away from the crop so as not to attract carrot fly to your rows.

As the plants develop you may need to earth up a little soil with a hoe to cover the tops of the roots and to prevent them becoming green should the soil be washed away by rain or regular watering.



A low barrier or covering of fleece will help to deter carrot fly

VARIETY CHOICE

There are many varieties to choose from and all are very good, but some are better than others for specific purposes. It has already been mentioned that on shallow or stony soils, round or short-rooted varieties are best, unless you decide to build a raised bed on top to

negate any problems. In the catalogues you will also see carrot fly resistant ones, those recommended for exhibition and others of different colours, from white to purple.

BEST FOR VERY SHALLOW/ STONY SOILS

■ **'ATLAS'**: A 'Paris Market' type, with round roots and a crunchy texture. (Marshall's)

■ **'PARIS MARKET'**: A heritage variety with spherical roots that's ideal for growing in containers or shallow soils. (Widely available)

■ **'EARLY MARKET'**: Stump-rooted type good for early or late sowings. (Kings)

BEST FOR EARLY SOWING

■ **'EARLY NANTES'**: Great for early sowings and container growing. (Widely available)

■ **'AMSTERDAM FORCING 3'**: A good one for starting under cloches in early spring. Best eaten young. (Widely available)

■ **'NORWICH F1'**: A Nantes type with long, uniform roots. (simplyseed.co.uk, D T Brown)

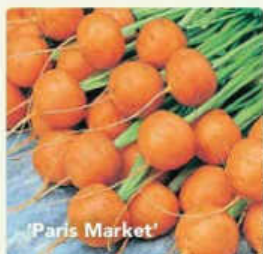
BEST FOR STORING

■ **'ESKIMO F1'**: Great cold tolerance makes this a good maincrop carrot for cold regions. (Suttons)

■ **'AUTUMN KING 2'**: A maincrop carrot. Very hardy so can be left in the ground over winter in most soils. (Widely available)

■ **'ST VALERY'**: Uniform maincrop type with good colour and flavour. Good for the show bench. (D T Brown, Tuckers, Kings)

■ **'CHANTENAY RED CORED 2'**: Time-honoured stump-rooted maincrop, great for shallower soils. (Widely available)



Picture: D T Brown



Picture: D T Brown



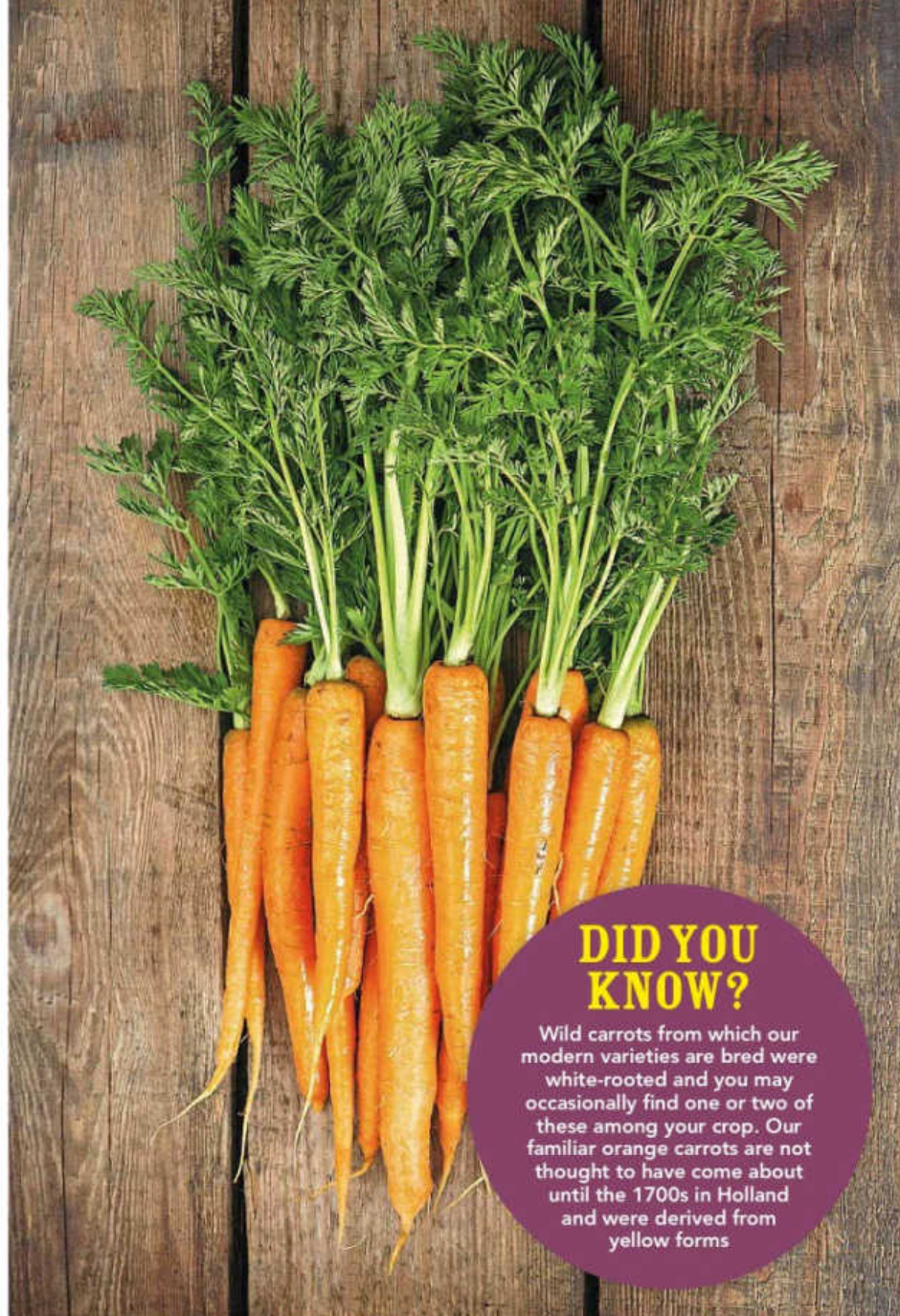
Picture: D T Brown



Picture: Suttons Seeds



Picture: Suttons Seeds



DID YOU KNOW?

Wild carrots from which our modern varieties are bred were white-rooted and you may occasionally find one or two of these among your crop. Our familiar orange carrots are not thought to have come about until the 1700s in Holland and were derived from yellow forms



Carrots will grow very well in deep pots

GROWING IN POTS

Carrots grow well in pots providing they are sown thinly and watered well. Any multi-purpose or seed-sowing compost will do or you can use growing-bag compost if this is cheaper. The depth of the container depends on the type of carrot being grown, but roots are best harvested as baby carrots rather than trying to produce full-sized roots, unless you are growing in very big containers.

To sow simply scatter the seeds over the surface of the compost thinly, allowing half an inch or so between each. The idea is to thin these gradually, using the thinnings as baby carrots and allowing the rest to grow on.

Water regularly and do not allow the foliage to wilt to avoid growth checks and split roots. Place the pots in a sunny place on the patio or similar but during hot weather shade the base of the pots from the full glare of the sun. ➤

BEST FOR CONTAINERS

■ 'SUGARSNAX F1':

Long, thin deep orange roots that are great for deeper containers. Great as fingerling carrots. (T&M, D T Brown, Tuckers, Kings, Simplyseed.co.uk)

■ 'RONDO': Round orange roots similar to 'Paris Market'. Fast-growing, it can be ready in as little as 42 days according to suppliers Suttons.

■ 'NAIROBI': A quick-growing early/maincrop carrot with uniform roots. (Kings, Tuckers)

BEST FOR RESISTING CARROT FLY

■ 'RESISTAFLY': A Nantes type providing heavy crops. (Widely available)

■ 'FLYAWAY F1': Good for shallower soils as it is slightly shorter than 'Resistafly F1'. (Tuckers, Simplyseed.co.uk, Kings, D T Brown)

BEST COLOURED CARROTS

■ 'PURPLE HAZE F1': Deep purple roots with contrasting orange cores. (Kings, D T Brown, T&M, Marshalls)

■ 'RAINBOW F1': Sweet roots in a range of colours from pale yellow to near red. (T&M, Kings, Suttons)

■ 'YELLOWSTONE': Good flavour from long, tapered yellow roots. (Suttons, Tuckers)

■ 'SAMURAI': Deep orange to red roots. High in antioxidants. (Suttons)

BEST ALL-ROUNDERS

■ 'ARTEMIS F1': Can be sown early or as a maincrop. Good flavour (D T Brown)

■ 'MARION': A tender Nantes type with a deep orange colour. (Marshalls, D T Brown)



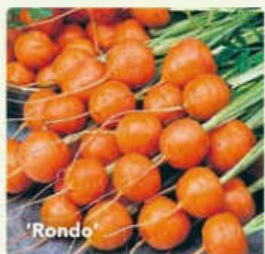
Picture: Suttons Seeds



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Lift the roots with a fork to avoid breakages

WATCH OUT FOR

■ **CARROT FLY:** There are two generations each year. The tiny flies are attracted to the crop by the smell of the leaves or may overwinter in the soil from previous crops to emerge as adults in May/June. They lay their eggs on the soil near the crown of the plants and the eggs hatch after a week. The larvae feed on the thin feeding roots eventually pupating in the soil and a second generation emerges in August/September and can act as a source of infection next season.

Control them with barriers of fleece or crop protection material, try resistant varieties or grow your carrots in pots or under cover in an unheated polytunnel. You can also use a biological control called Nemasys Grow Your Own and this will also control other soil pests such as cabbage fly.

■ **APHIDS (GREENFLY):** These pests spread viruses as they feed on the tender growth, often near the crown. Spray with a suitable insecticide as necessary.

■ **SLUGS:** Subterranean keeled slugs are the biggest problem. Some control can be gained with traps and barriers, but a biological control similar to the above called Nemaslug is useful since it is watered into the soil to reach the pests in situ.

■ **SPLIT/FORKED ROOTS:** Split roots often occur if the rows become dry and are then watered heavily or if rain occurs. Keep watering as even as possible and mulch around rows on free-draining soil. Forking often occurs on very stony ground or that which has been recently manured. Remove large stones or grow in raised beds or pots. Avoid sowing in recently manured soil.

HARVESTING

Most varieties of carrot are very hardy and can be left in the ground over winter. However, on wet soils or those badly infested with slugs or carrot fly, it is best to lift and store them (see p40). Simply cover the rows with cloches or straw held down with some chicken wire to keep the worst of the frost off and prevent splitting.

Otherwise water the rows the night before harvesting if the soil is dry. Expose the tops of a few roots to check their size and pull a few to see if they are ready. If they are and selecting the

largest, lift with a small border fork or hand fork rather than pull the tops. Firstly the tops may simply break off leaving the root in the ground and secondly the action of gripping the tops and damaging them will release that essence of carrot that the carrot fly needs to find your crop.

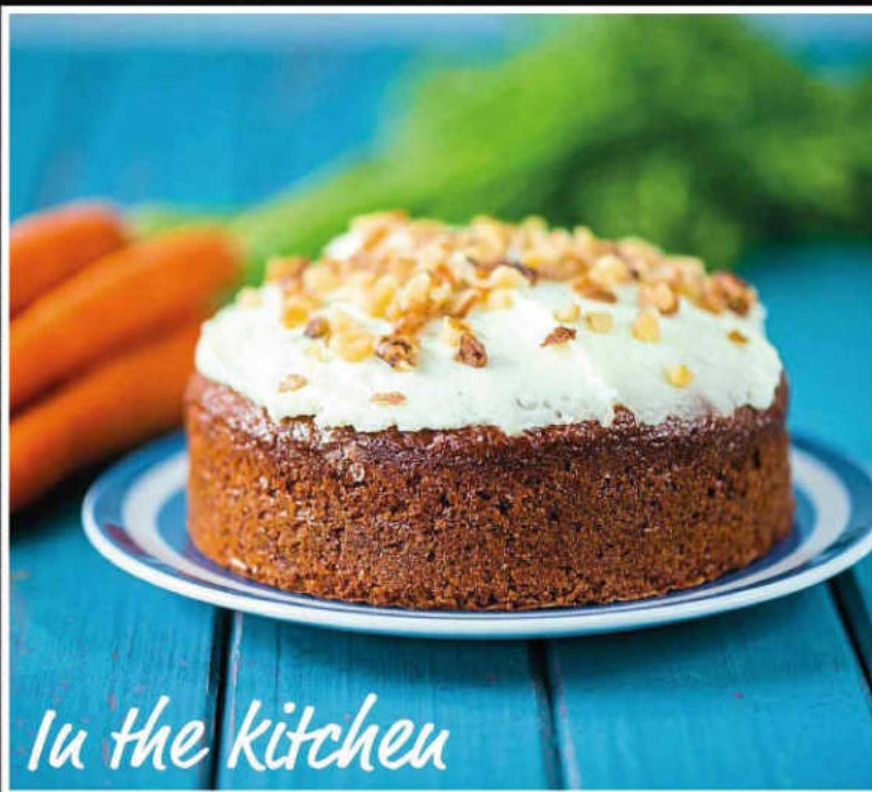
In smaller pots you can simply turn the whole lot upside down and slip the pot off to see if those around the edges are of harvestable size.

Once lifted take your harvest away from the rows as soon as possible and trim and clean them well away from the plot. ■



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TRADITIONAL CARROT CAKE

- 155ml (5fl oz) sunflower oil
- 230g (8oz) self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp mixed spice
- 230g (8oz) muscovado sugar
- Finely grated zest of 1 small orange
- 100g (3½oz) chopped walnuts, plus some for decoration
- 260g (9oz) carrots, coarsely grated
- 3 medium eggs, beaten

FOR THE ICING

- 50g (1½oz) softened butter
- 200g (7oz) cream cheese
- 150g (5oz) icing sugar
- 2 tsp orange juice

1. Preheat the oven to 180C/fan160C/gas 4. Lightly brush an 18cm (7in) loose-bottomed round cake tin with oil. Sift the flour, spice and baking powder into a suitable bowl. Add the sugar, zest, nuts and carrots. Mix thoroughly. Stir in beaten eggs and oil and thoroughly incorporate.
2. Transfer to the tin and bake for 60 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool for a few minutes before turning out on to a wire rack.
3. While the cake cools make the icing by placing the butter into a large bowl and beating until soft. Add the cream cheese and mix well. Sift in the icing sugar, add orange juice and mix until smooth.
4. To decorate use a spatula to spread the icing mix over the top of the cake. Scatter with chopped walnuts

NEXT MONTH: Back to basics with courgettes



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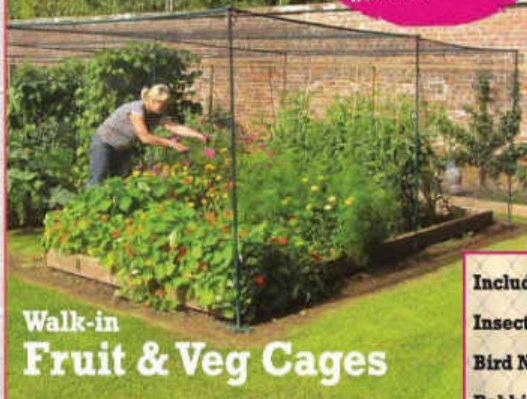
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MEET THE PLOTTERS

Around the country the veg growing community will be hard at work preparing for the new season. Here we feature some of our readers on their plots last year

HAYLEY MOISLEY FROM HELLINGLY, EAST SUSSEX

Hayley has an allotment which measures about 10 by 20 metres.

"I currently live in a flat without a garden. I have made a couple of pallets into a vertical garden outside my front door to grow quick-growing crops but I still miss having a garden."

Do you tend your plot on your own?

I took on the plot by myself as I was living with my parents at the time and saw the space as my own. It's a place I come to unwind and relax. A few months ago I was offered a job two hours away. Being a university graduate I could not turn down the opportunity, so I had to relocate. The thought of giving up my allotment was devastating – it was springtime and I had put so much hard work and effort into transforming a disused, overgrown plot to an area with my shed, cold frame and six raised beds all prepared for the season ahead. My parents gave me a lifeline; I come back every other weekend normally for a family or friend occasion, which gives me the opportunity to maintain and harvest my plot while my parents water through the dry times during the week, which is invaluable help.

How long have you been growing veg?

My first attempt at growing was three years ago when I was 20. The first crop I grew was pak choi purely because I liked eating it so much. I grew them in pots and dotted them around my parents' garden. I was amazed at the process from a tiny seed to harvest; the hunger for learning made me try to grow more and more crops.



What variety of veg can you recommend?

Squashes are a great place to start. Courgettes are prolific croppers; it's the first year that I have grown them and I will definitely be growing them again. Also, they are really versatile in cooking. Winter squashes are easy to grow and if stored correctly can last you all through the winter.

Do you grow any veg in containers?

Most of my beds are raised. This was a decision I made quickly as the soil is heavy clay. I first looked at the plot in April and I noticed other plots were waterlogged, which wasn't a good sign. I salvaged all of the wood for the beds locally and for free. One of my biggest beds has been made for my carrots

and parsnips. The bed is two scaffold boards high so too high for the carrot fly. All my beds have been filled with a mix of compost and manure from our communal compost heaps. For my carrot and parsnip bed I used half sand, half compost.

Why are you passionate about your plot?

I love being able to grow my own food and be self-sufficient. One day I hope to have a smallholding. I feel that I would have fitted in with life a couple of centuries ago; however, I wouldn't have the support of social media. Gardening is quite a solitary task, it is nice to have the peace and quiet, but I find sharing on social media makes you part of a bigger community, celebrating successes and sharing advice when things don't go to plan. Gardening is becoming more popular with younger generations but unfortunately I do still feel some prejudice from the older, experienced allotmenters. Some are so kind and generous with their knowledge, but others expect you to give up after the first hurdle. I enjoy changing those opinions and proving that age has nothing to do with your gardening potential.





Amber is justly proud of her tomatoes

AMBER HINE FROM LONDON

Amber got her allotment in May 2014. She used to help her parents when she was younger. Two years ago she started a local growing project in a green space attached to the flats where she lives.



Do you tend your plot on your own?

Yes, for the most part, but I travel for work and have been lucky to have a neighbouring plot owner, and a couple of others who have graciously splashed some water around for me when I am away.

Do you have an allotment?

I have a 10-pole plot on an allotment site in North London. I live a borough over so have the good fortune to be able to share rides with a few other plot holders which is good for me, them and the environment!

Do you grow in containers?

I grow many crops in containers from blueberries and currants to carrots and potatoes! But when pushed I would have to say that the pepper – chillies and sweet peppers – have been my greatest container success. I grew them in 20cm

pots, three in each, in my greenhouse so that they could be raised off the ground and on to my table (built out of pallets) to increase, even slightly, their temperature. I used a combination of growing bag soil, leaf mulch (from my obliging parents) and plenty of food. I fed them with nettle and then comfrey. I did also include molasses after reading some of James Wong's books; however, I think it tamed the chillies somewhat (I should have left it just with the toms!) so I will be omitting that next year, but they are definitely on the list!

How do you grow one particular crop?

I grew tomatoes from seed for the first time last year – I was given young plants by friends/family the previous year. I grew different varieties and some from seeds I had saved the previous year. I started them really early in February. I have some very understanding flatmates – the living room window ledge was covered! The plants always looked a bit sad when they were taken to the allotment for the day to be potted on (always sinking quite a bit of the stem too), but perked up pretty quickly. By the middle of March they were in the greenhouse full time, raised off the ground either on my potting table or growing bags that were warming up inside.

Amber's North London plot is her pride and joy. At only 26 she was elected chair of the committee of the self-managed site





Despite having limited time to garden, Amber's plot is packed with flowers and veg

When it came to their final growing position I put most outside in well-fertilised raised beds, tightly packed as prescribed by James Wong, among a cane framework to support the plants. The ones in the greenhouse were in a raised bed filled with manure, growing bag soil and slow-release fertiliser, supported by wire and string using greenhouse clips and tent pegs to secure/anchor the supports. I also have a solar-powered watering system which has been essential, what with my work-based travel, in keeping my crops alive!

The plants outside were pinched out when two trusses had set. This year I will be growing most of my tomatoes outside as they were such a success! My favourite tip for tomatoes... don't stress so much about them and don't let someone on something like an allotment site pressure you into changing the way you want to grow them. The plants want to grow, they want to produce fruit, you

may get a few more one way and a few less the other, but it's not worth the stress. I have seen some people in tears over tomatoes. There will no doubt be people giving them away if yours haven't turned out quite right!

Why are you passionate about your plot?

I am passionate about my plot because of what it does for me, for others and to some degree the fragility of the continued supply of such places in built-up cities such as London, where land is in high demand. I joined my self-run allotment society in May 2014. In September that year I was elected to the committee. Between then and the next AGM we lost our chair – I took over until the AGM where I was then elected by the whole society to hold the post. I am 26 and there are many jokes about bringing the average age down on the site by quite a margin! Though I am glad to see that this has had a

“Our current focus is to protect our site for future generations, and the ones that are here now!”

WHAT VARIETY OF VEG CAN YOU RECOMMEND TO OTHER KITCHEN GARDENERS?

Cucumber ‘Crystal Apple’ – they were a first for me this year, and have been not only great croppers, but also a useful ‘one meal’ size.



slight renovation in the last couple of years. We face many of the same problems as other sites, but with the added threat of the sheer value of our land. Recently, a council-owned building next door has lost its purpose and the future of that building seems to us to be tied up heavily with our site.

Our current focus is to protect our site for future generations, and the ones that are here now. It is so important to many, providing a strong sense of community that can be lacking in a modern-day society. ➤



Chillies are among Amber's favourite container crops



Amber feels that allotments are an essential part of the community

DAVID OXLEY FROM DONCASTER

Just before he retired David applied to be put on the council allotment waiting list and four years later in 2013 he was offered a 250sq ft plot near where he lived. David said: "The plot was six feet high in weeds but I accepted the challenge. What I did not know was that hidden by the weeds were two 17ft by 7ft sheds, both in ruins!"

In 2015 David received a Silver Gilt certificate for his allotment as part of the Doncaster in Bloom competition

Do you tend your plot on your own?

I attend my allotment almost every day, mainly from morning to about 3pm.

My wife comes with me usually two days a week to share the weeding and plot aesthetics, in addition to her cut flower section.

How long have you been growing veg?

Up to taking on the allotment my vegetable growing had been limited to an onion patch and a 6ft by 8ft greenhouse which housed a couple of tomato plants each summer. However, I do remember helping my father, who after the Second World War was limited with only one arm, to tend his outdoor tomatoes, asparagus and gooseberry and blackcurrant bushes.

What variety of vegetable can you recommend?

Last year I grew nine different varieties of tomato from seed, a couple of which were collected from the previous year's tomatoes. The varieties were 'Shirley', 'Golden Sunrise', 'Vanessa', 'Black Russian', 'Sweet 100', 'Goldrush', 'Montecarlo',

'Ailsa Craig' and 'Alicante'. In addition I sent for the much promoted blight resistant 'Crimson Crush' – but was disappointed. Blight resistant it might be but I did not get many flowers and the fruits were not pleasing either.

Although all the other varieties did well I can definitely recommend 'Vanessa'. This produces good consistent-sized tomatoes on the vine. This is one variety on this year's list.

Do you grow any veg in containers?

I have experimented with sweet peppers, mainly from seed from supermarket-bought produce, and chillies in both pots and in the ground. Both did equally well. The 'Hungarian Hot Wax' chillies have been most prolific.



This was the state of David's plot when he took it over



David's had his plot since 2013 and last year won an award in the Doncaster in Bloom competition

How do you grow one particular named crop?

Text books and colleagues say that parsnips should not be transplanted. In 2014 I started my parsnips ('Tender and True') in newspaper-made paper cups in a propagator in early February. I planted these out in March and they produced very large parsnips – some forked but that was because I rushed them into the ground without preparing the soil to take out the hundreds of stones I have on the plot. The problem with this method was trying to open the bottom of the paper cups without damaging the seedling roots. This ended up with about a 20% failure rate at the transplanting stage.

Last year I used Roottrainers in a propagator, again starting early February. In March I used my dibber made from an old spade handle to produce 12 to 15in deep holes which I filled with a fine compost and just lifted the parsnip 'plugs' in the holes. My parsnip plants are bigger and stronger than on most other plots.

Why are you passionate about your plot?

I really enjoy growing veg from seed, whether it be onions started late December followed by tomatoes, etc., from January onwards to winter onions late August/early September – only an allotment gives you that. In addition, I enjoy the social side of allotmenting i.e., sharing a cup of tea with other plot holders while solving the world's problems and, of course, the usual banter about each other's successes and failures. ■



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EARTHY PARADISE

Tucked away on the edge of the Cotswolds is an allotment field where the peace is shattered only by the drone of hoverflies and bees. **Benedict Vanheems** visits the village of Filkins to tour Pauline Care's pristine plot





Paths between the beds are meticulously edged and mowed

As far as allotment settings go, Pauline Care's has to be among the most idyllic. Set on the edge of the Cotswolds in the Oxfordshire village of Filkins, the small but perfectly formed allotment field is hemmed in by honey-coloured stone buildings on one side and a peaceful meadow on the other.

The site is brimming with wildlife – from hoverflies and frogs to garden birds such as blackbirds and robins. “Only last night we watched a barn owl being pursued by a kestrel. It was just incredible to see,” says Pauline. “They hunt in the adjacent field.”

The beautifully tended allotments may look as if they've been here for decades, yet ground was only broken in spring 2011, as Pauline explains: “I saw an advert in the local paper inviting people interested in tending an allotment to phone this number. Enough of us responded for the parish council to go ahead with the new allotment field.

“We were allocated our plots on a lottery basis, so I had no choice as to which plot I'd get. Most are half plots but there are two quarter plots too. In this day and age they are a much better size for people's busy lifestyles. Of course, when you begin the winter dig it still looks enormous. Then as soon as things start coming up it looks so small!”

The site is owned by the Ernest Cook Trust, a countryside education charity, and administered by the council. Its prevailing sense of order is partly down to the fact that plot holders are not allowed to put up sheds or plant trees. Each plot is divided from the next by neat grass paths and part of the agreement with the trust is that these are kept tidy.

PATHS TO PRODUCTIVITY

Pauline's allotment is certainly neat and tidy, though not in an overly manicured way. Her plot is divided into three rows – one laid to three beds, the other to two, while the third is home to permanent crops such as rhubarb and autumn raspberries, as well as an assortment of compost bins. This set-up not only helps with crop rotation but ➤

Discover
Pauline's recipe
for Allotment
Cake in our digital
magazine

PAULINE'S TOP TIPS

■ STICK WITH IT:

There are so many things thrown at you: frost pockets, the wind, slugs. Here we have a mole that's undermining the ground. The only answer is to fight back and keep going. Never lose heart!

■ BUM DEAL:

Look out for free manure. My horse manure is sourced from the website Freecycle. It's three or four years old and wonderfully crumbly. A friend and I load up the car then split it between us.

■ DRIED BEANS:

I save borlotti beans for sowing the following year. The pods look so stunning you almost don't want to pick them! The beans are great for winter veggie casseroles.

■ SEEDS OF

CHOICE: I love the baby pumpkin 'Munchkin'. It scrambles up supports and, because the fruits are portion-sized, there's very little waste. Last year I also grew a stunning red lettuce 'Merveille des Quatre Saisons' (available from Sarah Raven: 0845 0920283, www.sarahraven.com).

■ THAT'S HANDY:

I'm always losing my gloves, so now I pop them on to the ends of my climbing bean supports.

serves to break the space up into manageable, bite-sized areas that can then be tackled section by section.

"My husband helps me mow the paths between each bed," says Pauline. "We have quite an antiquated push mower but because the paths are quite narrow it's perfect for the job. I've edged the paths and they've got narrower over time. My husband says I'm not to trim them back any more!" It is reassuring to see that a small area of grass has been left intact – a place where Pauline and her husband can enjoy a picnic or just lie down, soak up the sun and take it easy, though there's always plenty to be done!

The half plot that Pauline tends is crammed with good stuff. "The allotment feeds my husband and me, providing us with the majority of our fresh veg during the summer. Last year the only things we had to buy in were sweet peppers. I don't grow any brassicas because of the space they take up. My allotment neighbour grows them so we do a swap. My other allotment neighbour grows 'Crown Prince' squashes, which we get two of every year. And I have hundreds of lettuces, so I just say to the others 'help yourself'. I also trade courgettes; you name it, if I've got a glut I'll give it away." In such a compact allotment field it's no surprise that a spirit of co-operation has developed, with each allotmenteer growing to his or her strengths. The result is more for everyone.

GLORIOUS GLUTS

Gluts aren't really a problem on Pauline's plot. If she's not trading or giving it away, she's turning it into all manner of delicious treats. "This year I'm growing chillies, which I love, so I'll be making some chilli jam. I try and make a lot of chutneys too, particularly from onions and courgettes.

"Rhubarb is a real favourite so I make a lot of rhubarb desserts. I love it chopped up then cooked in the oven with a few vanilla pods. It's also great with angelica stalks. Then of course there's the usual crumble and fools. I keep stewed rhubarb in the freezer for when it's needed."

Rhubarb is the key ingredient to her allotment cake, which also uses carrots and courgettes – efficiently taking care of three very prolific croppers.

COLOURFUL PALATE

One of the striking features of Pauline's allotment is its riot of colour, both from vegetables above and below ground and the flowers planted to attract beneficial insects. Beetroot such as 'Golden Detroit' and 'Chioggia' rub shoulders with a rainbow mix of carrots. White, red and yellow onions are planted in an alternating pattern, while green and red loose-leaf lettuces both complement and contrast. ➤



Pauline picks climbing French bean 'Blauhilde' for dinner



Alternating red and green lettuces provides food for the soul – and salad bowl!



Colour is added courtesy of pollinator-friendly blooms, including cosmos and calendula



Rhubarb is Pauline's favourite glut

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"I like to try different things every year. For example, you can buy ordinary courgettes in the shops but you can't get the yellow ones such as 'Tristar', ball-shaped varieties or ridged types."

But it's the flowers that are the star of the show. Having lived in The Netherlands for much of her teaching career, Pauline has grown to love her cut flowers. "Tulips are so cheap over there, so I got used to having them."

"Cut flowers are just beautiful and the more you cut them, the more they will grow. And that's why I adore sweet peas, which also bring height to the allotment and help to create three-dimensional interest." Pauline cuts supports for her climbers from a coppiced area; the hazel gives a lovely natural look.

She also recommends dried-out buddleia stems as a convenient and free alternative to bamboo canes.

OPEN DAY

Filkins Allotments opens under the National Gardens Scheme as part of the Broughton Poggs and Filkins group of gardens, five miles south of Burford, Oxfordshire. The next open day runs from 2-6pm on Sunday, July 3, 2016. Entry £5, children free. Visit www.ngs.org.uk for more details.

LEFT: Pauline uses hazel or buddleia stems to weave supports for climbers

RIGHT: A scarecrow guards the composting area

BELOW LEFT: A quiet corner to take in the buzz and colour of the allotment

BELOW RIGHT: Compost and manure fuel the lush summer growth

"Cut flowers are just beautiful and the more you cut them, the more they will grow."

NATURAL ALLIES

"I grow hyssop for the beneficial insects it brings in. When you're gardening it's wonderful to hear that buzz and see how much wildlife there is. Hyssop is traditionally called the 'bee herb' but this morning I also saw butterflies on it. We recently had ornamental alliums in flower and the sound from the blooms was almost deafening! Then there's borage for Pimms or to decorate the allotment cake, and calendula petals for adding interest to salads."

The presence of wildlife on the allotment is obvious. Pauline is an organic gardener greatly inspired by the allotment sites at Garden Organic's headquarters at Ryton, near Coventry. Working with nature rather than against it is in her blood. She has included a tiny pond on her plot, fringed with stone and hidden behind by a towering screen of fennel. The result is lots of frogs – an on-site band of slug-ravenous amphibians that keep the slimy invaders in check. "And when I've been digging I've had a female blackbird join me whose beak was so full of insects," adds Pauline. "Robins are regular companions."



PARSLEY SIGHTED

Parsley is left to run to seed, proving a real magnet for insects such as hoverflies, as witnessed on my visit. Parsley is grown in prodigious quantities for garnishing and for pesto. Pauline makes her parsley pesto by blending washed bunches with toasted pine nuts and a good, hard cheese while drizzling in extra virgin olive oil. It's used in pasta or to finish off an allotment risotto.

Contrary to the popular complaint that parsley is hard to germinate, Pauline has no such problems: "I water the drills beforehand to help the seeds along. It grows wherever I sow it. I love parsley, so I need a lot of it!"

Despite her success, Pauline admits she's still a novice prone to relying on trial and error. "During my first season on the allotment I planted my beans and courgettes far too early – this is a frost pocket – and I lost them all. Then the second year I lost them all again because I thought it was okay to plant them out. So I wrote in my diary 'don't you dare plant out beans and courgettes in early May!' We gardeners are an impatient lot. Now I err on the side of caution.

"Sometimes growing your own isn't a cheap thing to do. But whereas some people go off and buy lipsticks and makeup, I'll go off and buy 10 packets of seeds." We reckon Pauline's 'habit' is a pretty healthy one – for both her and the wildlife that shares her allotment. ■



INSET: Parsley is allowed to run to seed

ABOVE: Cosmos is just one of the cut flowers Pauline loves to grow

LEFT: Sunflowers nod in the summer sun



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SEED SOWING:

What's hot and what's not

March is traditionally the time when many of us start to sow tender crops under cover and hardy ones outside. **Steve Ott** offers his top tips for success while our expert team reveal their veggy loves and hates



Take time to prepare the soil thoroughly

This is the month when most gardeners will venture out and start to fill their plots with all the seeds they have been hoarding up over the winter months. It's an exciting time when we all look forward to the challenge of growing the crops and the joy of harvesting the fresh produce later in the season.

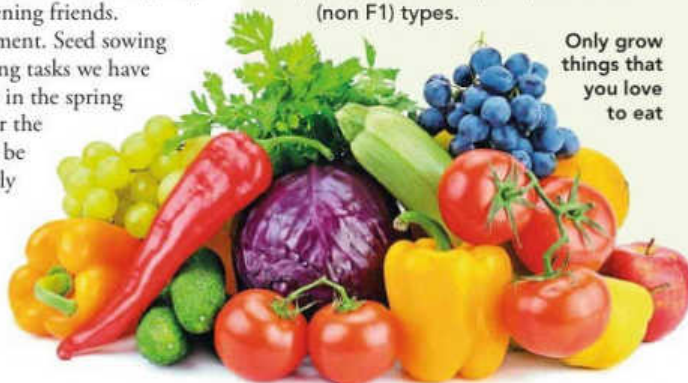
We invest a lot in terms of time, work and money in the hope of filling the freezer in the months to come, so it's worth taking some time before starting to make proper preparations and not to start sowing before conditions are right. It also makes sense only to grow what you and your family like to eat, so when searching the catalogues, be strong; refrain from growing too many or too much of crops that are as yet untried by your taste buds. Having said that, trying new things does add to the excitement and offers a way to keep the hobby fresh, so treat yourself to just one or two novelties each spring and swap notes with gardening friends.

Above all enjoy the moment. Seed sowing is one of the most rewarding tasks we have to do and it comes mainly in the spring – a time full of promise for the season ahead. What could be better than an empty, newly raked patch of soil just waiting to be sown... apart from the same patch brimming with fresh produce to harvest, of course! ➤

WHAT TO GROW: MAKING THE CHOICE

- Only grow what you know you will eat.
- If you have room, try a couple of novelties to ring the changes.
- Stick to things that thrive on your soil and in your location. A sneaky look at what your neighbours are growing might offer some clues.
- Make a note of the varieties you like the taste of so you can order them again. Try occasional new ones alongside those to see if you like them more.
- Only sow as many seeds of fast-growing crops as you know you can eat. Slower-growing maincrop vegetables can usually be stored in some way.
- If you intend to save seeds from your crops, try to choose open pollinated (non F1) types.

Only grow things that you love to eat



OUR EXPERTS' LOVES AND HATES

We asked some of our regular contributors for their must-grow crops – and also if there were any fruit or vegetables they would not grow again. Here is what they said.

BOB FLOWERDEW

I could not be without strawberries and lots of them, in variety, and in buckets not the ground. I grow a host of sweet potatoes, under cover, also in buckets. And I must have potatoes for chips particularly 'Cosmos' and 'Vivaldi'. The Cape gooseberry is without doubt one of the best 'unknowns'. However, I could go a few millennia before ever dreaming of bothering to grow a cucamelon again.



Cape gooseberries are among Bob's favourite lesser grown crops

ANNE SWITHINBANK

Runner beans are so must-have that when we were creating the kitchen garden here, I dug up a bed in the front garden and grew them there. I'm not fussy about variety because I've tried many and they've all performed well and tasted great. Next favourite is tasty, reliable and productive purple sprouting broccoli 'Claret'. Third, tomato 'Sungold' for sweetness and flavour. Fruitwise, we struggle with raspberries and loganberries on our heavy soil and rely on boysenberry for compotes, tarts, summer puddings etc. We didn't get on well with achocha (a gherkin-like member of the cucumber family) which cropped well but we hardly ate any of the fruits. I'm chef as well as grower and needed more time to experiment with recipes.



According to Anne, you can't beat a good runner bean, no matter what the variety

ROB SMITH

Although they're seen as pretty ordinary, I don't think I could do without onions and garlic! What other vegetable do you use almost every day, for nearly every main meal?



From sauces to fillings, curries to pasta dishes, onions are used in them all. Also, who doesn't like a nice crunchy pickled onion or a cheese and onion sandwich made with nice sharp Cheddar?

On the flip side, there's chicory and endive. Why anyone would choose to eat these bitter monsters is beyond me! They are just one of those things that set my teeth on edge. People of Italy, you can keep them.

Rob, winner of the Big Allotment Challenge in 2014, really knows his onions

Sowing top tips

OUTSIDE

Sowing outside saves time and money (no compost, trays or heat) and is ideal for very hardy crops, especially rootcrops such as carrots and parsnips which resent root disturbance.

- Prepare the soil by removing weeds and raking to a fine tilth. Incorporate 56g (2oz) of general fertiliser per sq yd/m a week prior to sowing.
- Before sowing ensure that the soil temperature is around 7C (45F) and is not too wet.



- Sowing in straight rows allows you to tell the weeds from the crops as the seedlings germinate.
- Label rows clearly and make a note in your crop diary of what was sown where and when. Also note the weather conditions.
- Mark the stick used to make your drills at half inch or 1cm intervals using a permanent marker or saw cut. This helps you to ensure that seeds are planted at the correct depth according to the seed packet.
- In dry weather water the base of the drill prior to sowing to provide the seeds with plenty of water for germination.

INSIDE

Sowing inside allows you to get a head start by sowing earlier than is possible outside in cold soil.

- Clean the glass or polythene covering your structure to allow maximum light penetration.
- Always use clean trays or pots and fresh compost. If reusing old containers, wash them thoroughly in a household detergent and rinse thoroughly before use.
- Sowing compost or multi-purpose compost is ideal for your seeds. Always buy fresh stocks at the beginning of the year for sowing to ensure the compost is at its best.

CHARLES DOWDING

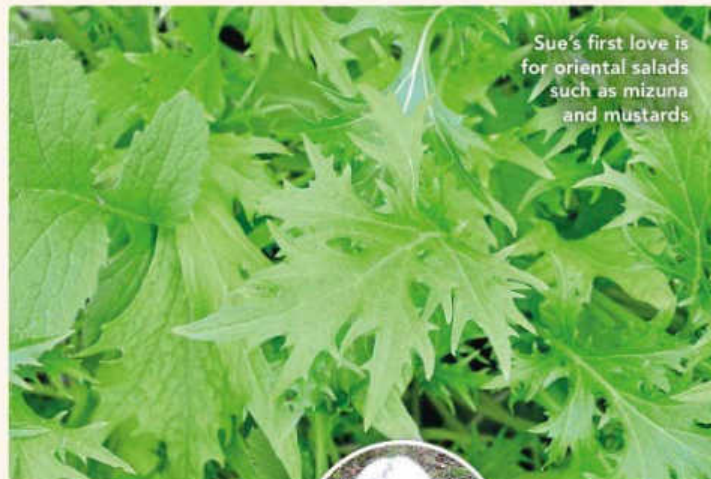
My must-haves are lettuce, basil, peas, broad beans, 'Black Russian' and 'Sungold' tomatoes in summer. Sweetcorn, leek and carrot in autumn and Brussels, spinach, mustard, beetroot, chicory and endive in winter, while pea shoots, sorrel, spinach, lettuce and broccoli help fill the hungry gap.



I love the way that veg depict seasons and offer what our bodies most need for each, including the soil microbes on winter roots to boost our immune systems.

Must-not-have is cucamelon, a bitter disaster, correctly called Mexican sour gherkin. I was also disappointed by 'Indigo Rose' tomatoes.

Charles agreed with several other of our experts that cucamelons are definitely a 'grow once, then forget' crop!



Sue's first love is for oriental salads such as mizuna and mustards

SUE STICKLAND

What home-grown crop wouldn't I be without? When we moved house and were vege-plot-less for a season, it was salads that I missed the most – not so much lettuce and tomatoes (shop-bought ones weren't that bad) but freshly harvested rocket and oriental greens such as mizuna and mustards, particularly in autumn and early spring. I also longed for just-picked raspberries – a few every day in season. This crop



has a long harvest period and is relatively trouble-free to grow, and even fruit from the market can't compete.

Now I have an established kitchen garden, there are few crops I'd want to do without. However, I never bother to grow celery. I find it difficult to produce stalks that are sweet and crisp enough for salads, and for use as a flavouring, the celery leaf (cutting celery) in the salad patch is just as good.

BEN VANHEEMS

My must-grow crop is beetroot 'Chioggia'. The beautiful concentric rings of this stunning beetroot are perfect shaved raw into salads to add colour and interest. I love it! This variety is a great way of adding that unmistakably earthy taste of beetroot to your salads. Perpetual spinach: it's far from sexy, but just keeps on giving, cropping steadily for months on end. It's great lightly steamed, but my favourite way of using it is to add generous handfuls to my morning smoothie – an instant vitamin boost and a vibrant green colour! ➤



Ben loves beetroot 'Chioggia' shaved raw into salads

- Sow small seeds in trays for pricking out (transplanting) into individual cells or pots later. Larger seeds (which includes most vegetables) individually straight into their own cells or pots to avoid root disturbance.
- Use fresh water from the tap to water your seed trays. Water stored in tanks and butts may contain diseases such as damping off.
- Label your trays clearly to avoid confusion later.
- A heated propagator is a real asset when sowing early in the season or when producing tender crops such as tomatoes, aubergines and peppers.

- Maintain gentle warmth to suit the crops being grown, avoiding big variations in temperature.
- Make sure that your young plants are thoroughly hardened off (acclimatised to outside conditions) before planting out permanently.
- Water your seed trays or pots from the base if possible to avoid disturbing small seeds. Stand the containers in a tray of clean water until the surface of the compost is wet.
- Once around 70% of your seeds have germinated in the propagator remove the lid and give them as much light as possible to reduce stretching and also humidity which may encourage disease.



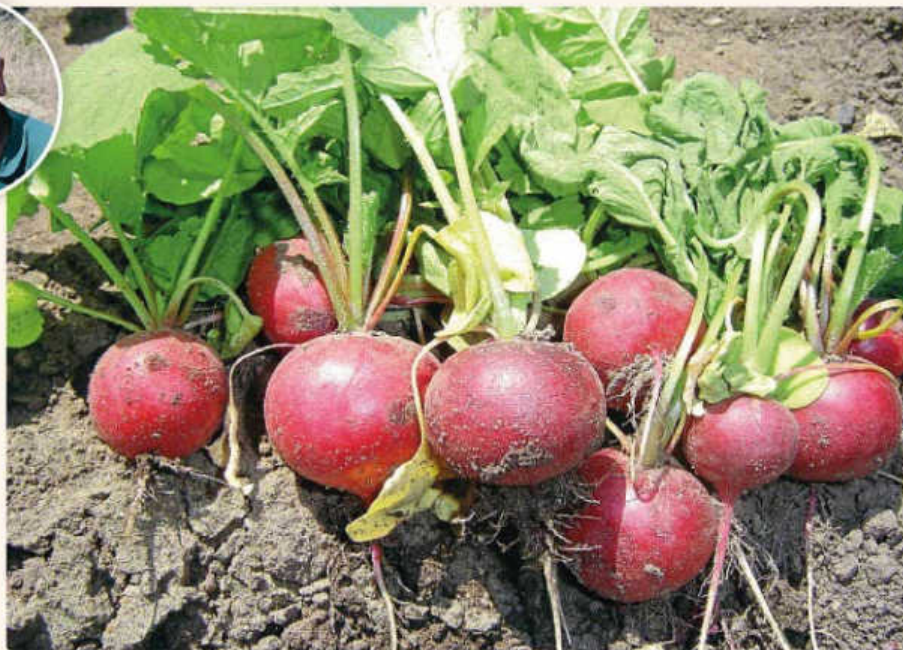
Watering from the base ensures that the seeds are not disturbed

COLIN RANDEL

My essentials are early salad/new potatoes. I plant a single tuber per eight-litre bag; 'Jazzy', 'Maris Peer', 'Athlete', 'Abbot' and 'Charlotte' are my favourites.

I also love quick-growing salad veg to sow and harvest in less than 30 days, sowing little and often, of summer radishes 'Mars' and 'Rainbow Mix', baby 'eat all' turnip 'Salad Delight', lamb's lettuce 'Favor', spinach 'Amazon' and rocket 'Astra' are staples. Waiting for two to three months for spring onions 'White Lisbon', finger carrots 'Adelaide', lettuce 'Mazur' and Little Gem lettuce 'Maureen'. Mangetout pea 'Sweet Horizon' and dwarf bean 'Mascotte' provide ample harvests in a small area over several weeks.

My pet hate – chilli peppers. T&M, where I have my day job, is growing a wide range this summer for a chilli fiesta. I will not be volunteering to taste them!



Fast-growing crops such as summer radish 'Mars' are on Colin's must-have list

JULIE MOORE

Raspberries are one of my favourite fruits. Even though they're expensive to buy in the shops, they're easy to grow. With summer and autumn varieties available, I can pick from July until early November, if I'm lucky. From salads to tarts to jam, I never tire of their sweet-tart flavour.

Pumpkins are a must. Although they take up a fair bit of space in the plot, I see it as an investment for the winter when other vegetables are scarce. They're versatile and can be used in anything from a hearty soup to a moist cake, while the roasted seeds provide a nutritious snack. With a long shelf life, I'll cook with them a couple of times a week until the supply runs out in March or April.

The only way to find apples with any depth of flavour nowadays is to have your own tree. I couldn't imagine my garden without several old English varieties which are good eaters, full of flavour and texture that store well.



Easy-to-grow raspberries are a hit with Julie

GABY BARTAI

'Must-grow' depends entirely on where you're growing. In my Somerset days, I'd have said French and borlotti beans, winter squashes and (obviously) tomatoes: the high-value, high-productivity crops that grow with gleeful abandon, given sunshine and good soil. Ten years later, in the Shetland Isles, it would have been root crops, Savoy cabbages and kale: the stalwarts that get on with growing irrespective of horizontal sleet.

Now that I'm in Glasgow, with a pocket-handkerchief plot, my must-grow crops are the ones I can tuck among the ornamentals and grow in pots down the path: chard, beetroot, kohlrabi, garlic, spring onions – anything with a small footprint and a flavour that resists the rampant local snail population.

Tomatoes, sadly, have fallen off my must-grow list. Outdoor tomatoes just aren't realistic in Scotland, despite any amount of shelter, global warming and wishful thinking. Last year's crop consisted of one tomato, so this year I'll be using the pots for more potatoes. I couldn't disagree more with the ubiquitous advice that potatoes aren't worth growing in a tiny plot. They do as well (or better) in pots than in the ground, and provide maximum gratification for minimum effort. I can't imagine a growing year without them – wherever I garden next. ■



Chard and other container veg are ideal for Gaby's little urban plot

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Veg at a glance **ROCKET**

Something of a standard addition to salads these days, rocket has a unique flavour. Tony Flanagan shows how easy it is to cultivate, whether growing it in the open ground or in containers



SOW:
April-September

HARVEST:
June-December

GROWING IN POTS

Like other salad leaf plants, rocket can be grown in a range of containers. I usually plant rocket in the compost left in growing bags at the end of the tomato season, but they can also be grown in pots or window boxes to make an attractive, leafy display. Ensure the compost is 10cm (4in) deep and don't let it dry out as this may well cause your plants to bolt.



Gone are the days when salads were made up of a few 'Little Gem' lettuce leaves next to the usual suspects: cucumber, tomato, spring onion and beetroot. Nothing wrong with that but these days I don't seem to be happy unless my salad plate has an array of different flavours and colours, including oriental mustards, 'Lollo Rossa' lettuce, watercress and, of course, rocket. But rocket is not just for salads – use it to make pesto, and add it to pasta dishes, stir fries and soups too.

SOWING

If you're sowing rocket outside, it's best to wait until April but you can extend sowing October though to March if you have a greenhouse, polytunnel or cold frame. For germination the seeds need a minimum temperature of 7°C (45°F). Sow seeds 5mm (½in) deep in fine soil or compost. If your soil is stony, you can give it a top dressing of multi-purpose compost to give the seeds a good start or simply make the drill a little bit deeper and sprinkle in a layer of compost.

Aim to sow thinly – ideally, 3cm (1½in) between seeds and then thin seedlings to 15cm (6in) apart when big enough to pick. Rows should be 30cm (12in) apart. Don't worry if you sow some too close together as young seedlings can be picked to make space for others and used as a garnish or in salads.

Rocket grows best in partial shade and in moisture retentive soil. As it is a member of the brassica family,

don't sow where brassicas have been growing in the previous two years. Sow successively every two weeks – you'll find that seed packets of rocket usually contain quite generous quantities.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

There's not too much you need to do with looking after rocket. Weed between rows and the plants themselves, and water during dry spells. You can also add a mulch of organic matter between rows to help conserve moisture in the soil. If growing rocket outside, cover with a cloche from autumn onwards.

HARVESTING

Rocket can be ready as quickly as four weeks after sowing depending on conditions. With rocket you have the option to use it as a cut-and-come-again crop or to pick plants entire. If plants start to flower, nip the buds so that they continue to produce leaves. Alternatively, let them flower – not only are the flowers edible, they have a beautiful star-shaped formation, and they are a great plant for attracting garden-friendly insects and butterflies.





TOP TIP

Feeding your plants with a fertiliser high in nitrogen will encourage vigorous growth so that there is too much foliage for flea beetles to keep up with



If you let your plants flower they will self-seed, providing you with a new crop the following year

WATCH OUT FOR

■ **FLEA BEETLE:** These can be a nuisance, creating holes in the leaves and impacting on seedlings in particular. Protect your plants with insect netting such as Enviromesh. Waving yellow sticky cards (available from garden centres) above the crop will catch the pests as they jump up.

■ **BOLTING:** If watering is irregular, rocket has a tendency to bolt so don't let the soil or compost dry out. Keep these moist but don't overdo the watering either as this will reduce the flavour of your leaves.



In the kitchen

ROCKET AND BASIL PESTO:

Add rocket leaves, basil leaves, crushed garlic, pine nuts, olive oil, lemon juice and finely grated cheese to a food processor and work it until the mixture turns into a thick paste. Add to pasta, salads, or use as a sandwich spread.



VARIETIES TO TRY

Wild rocket varieties (*Diplotaxis*) have a stronger peppery flavour than standard, sweeter rocket varieties (*Eruca sativa*).

■ **'APOLLO':** This is a fast maturing, standard variety with a peppery flavour. More suited to cut-and-come-again and for eating when the leaves are still young. (D T Brown, Mr Fothergill's, T & M)

■ **'SKYROCKET':** A strong peppery flavour – a standard variety but having some of the punch of wild rocket. Slow to bolt and high-yielding. (D T Brown)

■ **'VOYAGER':** This is a wild rocket variety, with dark green 'oak-leaved' edges. Slow to bolt. (Unwins, Marshalls)

■ **'WASABI':** This is a new variety and hot. Can be grown as a cut-and-come-again or to full maturity. (Exclusive to T & M)



ON
TEST

BEEFSTEAK TOMATOES

With those fleshy giants of the tomato world in focus, Colin Randel, a member of the RHS Vegetable Trials Assessment Panel, reports on the most recent Award of Garden Merit (AGM) trials of beefsteak varieties grown in a polytunnel

Beefsteak' tomatoes have not been assessed since 2003 and of those cultivars awarded an AGM then, 'Beefsteak', 'Canestrino de Lucca', 'Costoluto Fiorentina', 'Legend' and 'Marmande' were included in this latest trial. There were some interesting skin and flesh colours, although most of the 34 cultivars (22 of these F1 hybrids) were red fruited. Beefsteaks' fruit size and weight are not an exact science but our trials panel agreed that this AGM trial had to produce a minimum fruit weight of 150g (many can attain more than 500g) and when sliced horizontally the fruit consisted of a minimum of three locules (these are the inner segments of each fruit).

SOWING

Seed was sown in the propagation house on March 17 in pans of peat-free compost, covered with a thin layer of vermiculite, and germinated at 23-25C (73-77F) bottom heat. When seedlings were large enough to handle they were pricked out into 9cm (3½in) biodegradable pots and grown on at 20C (68F) day temperature and 16C (61F) at night, reducing after three weeks to 15C (59F) day and 13C (55F) night. Seedlings were watered with a fine rose with maintained moisture throughout the root zone but not overwatered. Feeding commenced at the three to four leaf stage with Sangral 1:1:3 at the ratio 1:100 until planting out. Sangral is a commercial product, but larger garden centres

stock suitable alternatives: e.g. Tomorite, Arthur Bowers and Growth Technology Tomato Focus.

PLANTING OUT

New Horizon peat-free growing bags (not tomato planters) were used. These were placed in the polytunnel on April 15 to warm through to 13-15C (55-59F). The bags were aerated by shaking and knocking them to break up any compacted compost. On May 6 they were prepared for planting – openings were cut 24cm (9½in) from the edge of the bag. A cross was cut out, 15cm (6in) long, creating a square hole for planting. Six drainage holes, three each side of the growbag, were cut 1-2cm (½-1in) and set up for drip irrigation. On May 9 the



Pleasant-tasting 'Supersteak'

TOP TIP

Epsom salts are a cheap source of magnesium and are used by many gardeners when their plants are fruiting to keep them 'shipshape'



'Indigo Blue Beauty' was not among the winners



Taste-testing the 34 varieties of harvested fruit



Assessing the variety 'Oxheart Sel Riviera'

WHAT IS AN AGM?

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Award of Garden Merit (AGM) is given to plants that perform reliably in the garden. The plants are trialed, usually at an RHS garden, and judged by a forum of horticultural experts. At each review, plants can have their AGM status confirmed or removed. The AGM list currently contains more than 7500 plants. For more information visit: www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards



The sliced fruits including 'Porterhouse', a multilocular variety, in the foreground

tomatoes were planted, two plants per bag (three bags per trial), strung, and side shoots pinched out as necessary.

GROWING ON

On May 15 the irrigation system was set for watering twice a day, 09.30 and 15.30, at 0.5 litre per plant per watering. The watering was reset for three times per day on June 10.

The plants were sprayed with Epsom salts, 10g per litre of water, as a foliar feed from May 22. Feeding commenced on June 5 with Sangral 3:1:6 at ratio 1:200 and biological control using encarsia began on June 7. On July 11 the lower

leaves to the bottom truss were removed and the plants were 'stopped' two leaves above the sixth truss on July 15.

JUDGING

The criteria were: taste, yield, appearance, resistance to pest and disease. Cropping records commenced on July 17 with Brix readings undertaken prior to the first judging assessments on August 20. These readings ranged from 4% to 6.5% – beefsteaks do not have the levels of 'cherry' cultivars which expect to be at least 8% to be considered sweet. A further judging assessment was undertaken on September 15. ➤

WHAT IS BRIX?

Brix is a measure of the percentage of soluble solids in the fruit's juice. For most fruits (including tomatoes) the soluble solids are sugars.

The concentration of soluble solids can be calculated using a refractometer which measures the ability of a solution to bend (refract) a light beam that is proportional to the solution's concentration.

THE AWARD WINNERS

There were 34 cultivars, 22 of these F1 hybrids. Cropping records commenced on July 17 and every three or four days until September 1. One plant in each bag was truss thinned to three or four fruits to allow for larger fruits to develop. The remaining plant in each bag was left unthinned and weights/counts recorded separately.

Ten cultivars were awarded an AGM. Fruit counts/weights for truss-thinned plants were provided for each AGM cultivar.

■ **'BOUNTIFUL F1'** – Appearance similar to a 'Marmande' producing large, red, slightly ribbed and flattened fruits. Fruits show the usual cracking at the crown. Multilocule, juicy, quite soft flesh. First fruits early to colour. 45 fruits/17,025g (average fruit weight = 378g). Brix 4%. (Available from Mr. Fothergills)

■ **'BRANDY BOY F1'** – Earlier ripening than 'Brandywine' with a more juicy and refreshing taste. Large, very ribbed, flattened, rose pink fruits. 43 fruits/14,920g (average fruit weight = 347g). Brix 5%. (Available from Plants of Distinction and SimplySeed)

■ **'BRUTUS'** – Good fruit uniformity, possible use on the showbench. Quite flattened, ribbed fruits with darker green crowns showing no signs of cracking before ripening. Multilocular flesh with a juicy refreshing taste. 41 fruits/17,170g (average fruit weight = 418g). Brix 4%. (Available from Thompson & Morgan)

■ **'ORANGE WELLINGTON F1'** – Flatter rather than round, smooth fruit, no greenback before ripening orange-golden. Fruits have five locules, juicy and with a lovely taste which lingers. 40 fruits/10,914g (average fruit weight = 273g). Brix 5.5%. (Available from Plants of Distinction)

■ **'OXHEART SEL RIVIERA'** – Oxheart/pear-shaped, large, smooth, multilocular fruits. Soft flesh of pleasant taste. 48 fruits/14,630g (average fruit weight = 305g). Brix 6%. Not yet available retail.

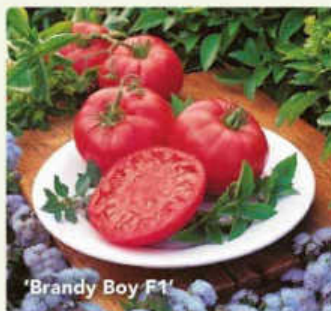
■ **'PEMBEPANTER F1'** – Smaller fruit than several beefsteaks. Fruits deeper rather than flat, quite early ripening. Fruits deeper pink-red skin, matt shine, ribbed with slightly darker crowns. Juicy but firm flesh with five locules. Very good taste. 42 fruits/11,848g (average fruit weight = 282g). Brix 6.5%. (Not yet available retail)

■ **'GIGANTOMO F1'** – From the same stable as 'Porterhouse', not quite as early, but fruits of good weight, flattened, green crowned ripening to red. Multilocular with juicy flesh not too soft and of a good flavour. 44 fruits/20,965g (average fruit weight = 476g). Brix 5%. (Available from Thompson & Morgan)

■ **'SUPERSTEAK F1'** – Quite flattened, large fruit with a smoother skin than several in the trial. Multilocular, juicy, quite soft flesh of pleasant taste. 30 fruits/16,195g (average fruit weight = 540g). Brix 5.5%. (Available from Plants of Distinction and SimplySeed)

■ **'TOMANDE F1'** – This is a hybrid 'Marmande', flattened fruit with green crowns before ripening, some ribbing. Multilocular, juicy and of good flavour. 46 fruits/15,206g (average fruit weight = 330g). Brix 5.5%. (Available from Nicky's Nursery)

■ **'BEEFMASTER F1'** – Large, deeply ribbed, green crowns before ripening. Multilocular, very juicy, soft flesh of pleasant taste. 36 fruits/21,123g (average fruit weight = 587g). Brix 6%. (Available from Kings)



'Brandy Boy F1'



'Supersteak F1'



'Orange Wellington F1'



'Gigantomo F1'



'Bountiful F1'



'Beefmaster F1'



'Brutus F1'

GROWING BEEFSTEAKS OUTSIDE

All of the above cultivars could be grown outdoors if a sunny, sheltered site is available, or in large pots on the patio, but as indeterminate plants they need staking and sideshoots will need to be removed. With the unpredictability of the spring weather it is better to delay seed sowing until mid-April as it takes about seven weeks from sowing to produce sturdy plants with first flower buds ready to plant out during the first week of June. Cold winds and frosts can still hit at this time so cut-off soft drink bottles make excellent makeshift cloches if carefully placed over the individual plants until they establish. ■

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101 TOP TIPS

FOR GROWING SUCCESS

Here in time for spring is a mega list of great tips that could help save you money and time and improve your growing skills this season

Plastic bottle creations

✦ To make a mini self-watering planter cut a bottle in half. Take the top of the bottle and drill a hole through the lid and insert a long strip of capillary matting. Turn it upside down and plant it up. Drop this into the base of the bottle that has been filled with water.



✦ Plant labels – Remove the top and bottom of a milk container with scissors or a craft knife. Cut down the length of the remaining plastic circle and fold out. Cut into strips about 1-2cm (½-1in) wide to make free plant labels.

✦ Mini cloches – Cut the base from the large spring water containers and stand them over tender crops to keep off the cold and pests.

✦ Plant pots – Simply cut bottles in half; the bottom half becomes a flat-bottomed pot, the top, with cap on, can be hung on a fence as a pot. Drill a few drainage holes in the base in both cases. Or use the bottle horizontally after cutting a section from the side of the bottle.

✦ Bird feeder – Cut a 'window' from the side of a bottle or milk container about half way up. Hang in a tree and fill up to the window with bird food.

Compost scoop – Cut the top from a four pint milk bottle. Cut at a slight angle leaving as much plastic above the handle as possible

✦ String dispenser – Cut the plastic bottle in half and make a hole in the lid. Hold the top of the bottle, cap end down, and staple or nail it to the wall or edge of a shelf. Drop a ball of string inside and thread the string through the hole in the lid. Place a pair of scissors in the cup as well.

✦ Onion planter – Take a large spring water bottle and cut the top off. Make 5cm (2in) holes all round it. Put a little compost in the bottle and when you reach the first row of holes insert onion bulbs into the holes with the necks just sticking out. Add more compost and water a bit as you go. Add another layer of onions. Keep going until the whole bottle is full. Place on a greenhouse bench or a windowsill. Snip off some leaves as they grow for a tasty flavouring to your cooking.

✦ Slug trap – Cut the end of a bottle off about a third of the way down. Turn this round and insert into the base of the bottle making sure you take the lid off. Fill the bottle with some beer or slug pellets and lay on the ground near your vulnerable plants.



Using a nail and hammer make holes in the lid of a milk bottle. Fill these with water and place around your plot or greenhouse. Really great to have these to hand when you spot a dry plant

✦ Storage containers – Take the lid off a pint milk bottle or jam jar and fix it to the underside of shelving with a nail. Fill the carton or jar with labels, screws, nails etc. and screw to the lid. Write on the bottle to show the contents.

Sowing tips

✳ Cover tomatoes, peppers and aubergines with fine sand rather than compost to help remove the seed coat as it emerges through the covering.

✳ Mix small seeds with a little dry silver sand before sowing to both make it easier to sow and reduce wastage.

✳ Save your empty seed packets somewhere safe for a year. It is easy to lose labels and to forget which varieties you sowed – which worked and which did not.

✳ Keep a crop diary and rough plan of what was sown when and where. A few notes on the weather can help too.

✳ Remember to sow a few annual flowers around the plot in spare patches. They make great cut flowers and will attract pollinating and beneficial insects to your plot.

✳ When sieving compost over seedlings you will end up with coarse material and lumps in the sieve. Don't throw these away but add them to the bottom of the next tray in a thin layer to provide drainage.

✳ Use tap water to water your trays of seedlings rather than water from butts and tanks. The latter often contain spores of diseases such as damping off.

✳ When sowing carrots into containers to grow as a patio crop, always sow thinly to allow the roots room to develop and to reduce competition.

Make paper pots out of newspaper. You can buy special wooden paper potters for moulding paper into the pots' shapes

✳ The 'seeds' of traditional open pollinated beet crops such as beetroot and chard are actually clusters of seeds and

often produce more than one seedling. In the case of beetroot you can thin these for the biggest roots, but leaving them to develop allows you to produce a little clump of smaller, tender roots.

✳ Always sow courgette, pumpkin, squash and cucumber seeds on their side (not flat), so that water doesn't rest on them and cause them to rot.

✳ Storing seeds in the shed? Pop them into a recycled plastic container with a tight-fitting lid to keep out vermin such as mice. Do the same with bird food. ➤

File your seed packets in an old shoe box in month order so you know exactly what to sow when

✳ If tomato seedlings are a little leggy, replant them. Bury the stem deeper and this will produce new roots and produce a stronger stem.

✳ When sowing fine seeds such as lettuce and parsley, add a thin layer of seed compost to the drill to get them off to a good start.



On the plot

✳️ Wrap cheap plastic buckets with hessian and tie jute string round to hold the hessian in place. Drill a few holes in the bases. Several of these packed with salads and other veg crops will look very attractive on a patio or along a wall or fence. You can buy an amazing range of colourful hessian or dye your own.

✳️ Coloured plastic balls for kiddies' ball pits make great cane toppers and supports for netting.

✳️ Recycle old compost by using it to grow potatoes in bags or salad leaves in shallow troughs. Alternatively, if it is too packed with roots, use it as a mulch around perennial crops.

✳️ Cover large wire hanging baskets with fleece and place over tender crops as a mini cloche.

✳️ Keep spare CDs and spray the dull/label side a bright, fluorescent colour to scare unwanted birds away.

✳️ Clean your greenhouse glass and polytunnel cladding at least once each year to allow as much light through to your crops as possible.

✳️ Walk around your plot every week looking for pests. Don't get distracted! Identify the problems as you find them and treat with an appropriate cure.

✳️ Save the very best from your crops to produce seeds for next year, marking them with coloured wool if appropriate.

✳️ Make good use of mulches during hot, dry weather. A thick layer of well-rotted manure or garden compost applied to moist soil will help reduce evaporation and suppress competing weeds.

✳️ Fit water butts to every available downpipe on outbuildings and sheds before the summer so that rains fill them for free.

✳️ Warm water intended for watering young plants by standing it in the greenhouse or polytunnel overnight before use.

✳️ Lift winter crops such as leeks, parsnips and carrots before they are needed during freezing weather and heel in to a sheltered spot close to the house to prevent them being trapped in frozen soil.

✳️ In summer conserve water by concentrating your efforts with the watering can on newly sown and planted rows of veg. Established plants are much better able to survive short periods of drought.

✳️ Shred woody prunings from fruit trees and bushes to make a free mulch for paths between beds of vegetables.

✳️ Keep weeds under control while still small when they are much easier to remove without disturbing crops and won't be harbouring pests and diseases.

✳️ Plant sweetcorn in blocks to aid wind pollination. Infill the spaces between with climbing beans which can use the stout corn stems for support and squashes to cover the ground to suppress weeds and prevent evaporation.

✳️ If you struggle with bending and digging trenches for your potatoes, plant them in individual holes instead. A long-handled bulb planter is great for making holes without bending and the potatoes can be dropped in, the soil replaced and firmed gently with your feet.

✳️ You don't need to spend out on timber to make raised beds. You can simply mark out beds, which should be as wide as you can easily manage to reach into the centre without treading on the soil. By adding organic matter to them each year they will gradually rise above the compacted paths.

Mix flowers with your veg for a colourful edible display that attracts bees. For example, here we have purple leaved orach, orange nasturtiums, chives and fennel



✳ Many crops can be sown in succession from spring until mid-summer to provide continued harvests, so don't restrict yourself to one big spring sowing. These include fast-growers such as salads and salad leaves and also carrots, beetroot and turnips.

Tight for space but want to grow scrambling squashes? Grow up a trellis or wigwam of posts. Tie stems regularly

✳ If growing pumpkins for the largest fruit, pinch out the growing tip once shoots have set one fruit.

✳ Green manures offer a great way to improve and replenish the soil. Include them in your crop rotation plans for the year and you should be able to reduce the need for artificial fertilisers.

✳ Don't have room for a full-sized greenhouse or polytunnel? Invest in a mini version which can still offer many of the same advantages of frost protection and extending the season both in the spring and autumn. There is a massive range available in all shapes and sizes or you can make your own if you are okay at DIY.

✳ When growing aubergines under cover, place a bucket of water next to the plants to raise humidity, which they like.

✳ If you have a very overgrown patch or are turning a patch of lawn into a vegetable garden, place a natural fibre carpet (or carpets) over the area in early autumn. This will kill off most weeds and also be easy to dig over in the spring.

✳ When planting onion or shallot sets, nick off any long tapers at the top so as not to attract birds who will want to pull them out of the ground.

✳ Use grass clippings as a mulch between rows of vegetables. This will keep weeds down (for a while) and help the soil to retain moisture.

✳ Sow a line of radishes (which are fast growing) along rows of slow-growing veg such as carrots and parsnips so you can see better where they will come up.



✳ Don't make the holes in growing bags too large as there will be more evaporation out of the compost where you want to retain moisture.

✳ Tie cauliflower leaves together with twine to cover the crown. This will stop the crown yellowing in the sun and with them tied together they will stay in place if it gets windy.

✳ At the end of the season, hang up trusses of green tomatoes inside against a window and they will ripen.

✳ If you have unripe tomatoes, put them in a box and add an overripe banana. The ethylene emitted from the banana will cause the tomatoes to ripen.

Sow a few seeds of nasturtiums when planting up your hanging baskets tomatoes to give a bit of colour



✳ If growing carrots in a container, plant chives round the sides to protect from carrot fly which won't be able to pick up the scent of the carrots.

✳ Sow sunflowers (medium height) and French climbing beans in the same large pot. The sunflowers will provide a colourful display and the beans will use the sunflower stems to climb up.

✳ If you have a herb patch, let your herbs flower and you will find that they are a magnet for butterflies, bees and hoverflies. Cut them back in autumn.

✳ To prevent bent and knobbly parsnips, make a deep hole with an iron pole, fill with multi-purpose compost and then add seed. ➤

Save some cardboard egg boxes or other bits of card and paper and tear or shred into small pieces to add to your compost bin in summer. At this time of year we end up with a lot of soft green waste but need some brown waste to create the right balance



❖ Overwinter chillies by cutting them back a little and keeping them in a warm place and adding a little water. In this way you will get an early crop the following year. (Seems to work better with some varieties than others).

❖ Grow your variety of sweetcorn away from other varieties as cross-pollination will reduce the sweetness of the cobs. If you're on an allotment it might be a good idea to check with others first to see what variety they are growing.

❖ If you have stony soil, grow a round carrot variety such as 'Parmex' or 'Rondo'.

❖ Eat sweetcorn as soon as possible after it has been picked as its sweetness will be reduced the longer you delay.

❖ Rather than gather leaves off your lawn, just run the lawnmower over them. The leaves will rot down much quicker if you intend to use them as leafmould.

❖ Pinch out the tops of chilli plants when they are 15-20cm (6-8in) tall as this will encourage bushier growth and more chillies!

❖ Store garlic at room temperature – not in the fridge as this will cause it to go mouldy.

❖ After your tomatoes have finished, reuse your growing bag to plant spring onions, rocket, mizuna or parsley under cover.

❖ Break up cardboard boxes and use the cardboard as a weed suppressant until you are ready to sow or plant. Use a brick if necessary or place soil around the edges to hold it down.

Maintain a patch of comfrey and nettles on a spare patch of the garden or veg plot. Both make great liquid feed and can be harvested several times each season. Nettles also make a good home for wildlife including peacock butterflies



❖ Don't throw away bubble wrap – it's perfect for protecting plants from frost.

❖ If growing shallow-rooted crops in a large container put some broken bits of polystyrene in the base so you don't need as much compost to fill the pot.

❖ Give your tomato and pepper plants a dose of Epsom salts as a pick-me-up. This can be applied as a foliar spray, two tablespoons per gallon of water fortnightly about three times over the summer months.

❖ When planting up hanging baskets place a circle of polythene or a plant pot tray in the base to help catch and hold on to water.

❖ Widger – cheap sweetcorn forks make great widders (mini forks) for lifting seedlings out of seed trays when pricking out.

❖ Instant measuring sticks – a standard trowel offers a good guide as to how far apart to plant young vegetables when setting them out in the spring. Similarly, summer prune your apple and pear trees once the new growth is as long as your secateurs – most are around 20cm (8in).

Pest and disease control

❖ If you spot a pest or disease problem, identify it quickly and research a cure. If no suitable cure is available and the problem is a serious one, uproot affected plants before it spreads to the rest.

❖ Make notes in your crop diary when pests and diseases are first spotted on your crops so you can anticipate problems next year.

❖ Always keep any pesticides, even organic ones, well away from children and pets. Although not officially required with many home pesticides it is sensible to wear disposable gloves and goggles when spraying. Cover exposed skin such as your arms.

❖ Never spray pesticides or foliar feeds in hot, sunny weather or when plants are dry.

❖ Use pesticides as a last resort. Often a few diseased leaves can be picked off or pests squashed without the need for other treatments.

❖ Don't worry unduly about rust disease on onions and leeks. The plants usually grow on and crop well despite the attack.

❖ Invest in a head torch for those late night slug and caterpillar forays – often the best way to control these nocturnal pests.

❖ Plant nasturtiums next to brassicas – these will attract cabbage white butterflies away from your cabbages!

❖ Crops in pots that are prone to slug damage should be raised up a little on bricks that are sat in a shallow tray of water. Make sure the leaves don't touch nearby walls, fences or other plants.



If buying blueberry bushes, buy two or more varieties rather than just one. The cross-pollination will lead to the production of more berries

Fruit

- ✧ Use rainwater rather than tap water when watering blueberries as rainwater is more acidic.
- ✧ If pushed for space, grow strawberries in tiers – big pot first, then middle-sized pot on top, and finally small pot on top of that. Plant strawberries round the sides of the bottom two pots and then as normal in the top pot.
- ✧ If you only have a small garden – or even just a balcony – and would like to grow fruit, choose blueberries. They grow well in pots, produce bags of antioxidant-packed fruit, have lovely flowers and great autumn colour. Don't like blueberries? Then grow strawberries instead.
- ✧ Thin tree fruit in July if your tree has set a heavy crop and does not seem to be losing any naturally. The remaining fruit will be larger and the tree is more likely to fruit well every year.
- ✧ Leave a few autumn raspberries unpruned in late winter/early spring. They should go on to produce a small crop of fruit in early summer.

Tools

- ✧ Maintain a sharp edge on hoes with an angle grinder to make the job of hoeing easier and more effective.
- ✧ Lightly oil the handles of hand tools, occasionally using teak oil or similar to keep them in good condition.
- ✧ Keep gardening knives sharp. You are much more likely to cut yourself while struggling with a dull blade when pruning etc.
- ✧ Human urine is a great compost activator, rich in nitrogen. You can also use it around your plants but in this case dilute it first, one part urine to 15 parts water. How you do this, we'll leave up to you but we suggest you avoid public displays! (Also, avoid doing this altogether if you are on medication.) ■



Keep a bucket of gritty sand in the shed and tip any unwanted oil from mowers and other machinery into it. When you have finished with hand tools such as spades, forks and trowels, clean off loose soil before dipping the blades into the oily sand a few times prior to putting away

Make a RUSTIC GATE

Whether to keep things in or to keep things out, you can't beat a good gate, but a rustic one offers much more than that – it is an invitation to explore the world it leads to. So why not make one yourself? Joyce Russell shows you how



Top tip

Hazel is particularly good for this project, but you can use any other straight poles or square timber

Let's take a moment to contemplate gates. There are wooden ones and metal ones and some that are just wires or strings. There are small gates and double gates and I've known some people to block any gap with a piece of old tin. Some gates are practical, others look nice, but the best of all are those that entice you to go further: to open them up and take a peek at what's on the other side.

Many projects have appeared in this magazine. They help to grow fruit and vegetables in the best possible ways. But here's one to make you want to step into the garden in the first place; and it invites you to go back in over and over again. A rustic garden gate is so quick to make; it can be single or double and any size that you need. It can be made totally from sticks from a hedgerow, or coppice, or you can compromise with a bit of sawn timber added in.

This gate fits across a particular path in my garden. I only needed one post and the gate closes on the other side against a low wall. Alter the dimensions and the number of posts to fit the place that you want yours to be. The technique is simple and easy to follow for any size or number of gates to suit your needs.

TOOLS & MATERIALS

- 4 @ 105cm x 50mm x 25mm (timber battens)
- 12 @ 84cm hazel poles for uprights
- 1 @ 140cm hazel pole diagonal
- 1 @ 150cm round fence post (or two if you need one at each side of the gate)
- 2 @ 10cm galvanised strap hinges and screws
- 6 @ 4mm x 40mm and 26 @ 5mm x 70mm screws

Straight crowbar, sledgehammer, drill with 3mm, 4mm and 5mm drill bits, saw, tape measure, pencil, screwdriver, sandpaper, garden snips, spirit level



STEP BY STEP MAKE A RUSTIC GATE



STEP 1: PUT THE POST IN PLACE

Use the crowbar to make a 40cm deep hole for the post (or posts). Use the sledgehammer to knock the post in place. This job is easier if you can gain some height above the top of the post when knocking it down. Use a spirit level to make sure the post goes in as upright as possible. This will make it much easier to have a gate that hangs level and opens without scraping against the ground.

Measure the width of the opening when the post(s) are in place. Knock 5cm off this figure to leave a small gap at each side. This gives the width of your gate and you can change timber sizes accordingly.

STEP 2: CUT HAZEL POLES TO LENGTH

Use the saw to cut poles to the desired length. Use snips to cut off any unwanted sideshoots. Keep an eye out for attractive features such as a twist of ivy or forked poles. Sand the edges of battens.

STEP 3: DRILL PILOT HOLES IN POLES

Use the 3mm drill bit to make a pilot hole in the centre of each end of the 12 upright poles. Eyeball the line of each pole when drilling and aim towards the far end so the hole is centred.

STEP 4: LAY OUT THE INNER FRAME

This includes one batten length at the top and bottom and the 12 upright poles spread evenly between them. This is roughly how the gate will look when finished so take time to move poles around until curves, gaps and features look right.

Mark on the top and bottom battens where the centre of each pole will go. These show drilling points to allow you to fix the poles in place. If you have a Y end on any pole then you will need to mark both tips of the Y. Number the end of the poles from one to 12 so you can replicate how they are laid out when you get to Step 6.



STEP 5: DRILL CLEARANCE HOLES

Use the 5mm drill bit at the points marked on the battens in step 5. If using any Y-shaped poles then drill holes at an angle so they aim directly for the ends of the Y tips.

On the top batten only: use the 4mm bit to drill three even-spaced clearance holes (one towards each end and one in the middle, but not too close to where hazel poles are marked).

STEP 6: FIX POLES IN PLACE

Use 5mm x 70mm screws to fix each pole, following the numbers marked at Step 4. Screws should pass through the clearance holes in the battens and into the pilot holes at each end of each pole. Aim screws at an angle if Y sticks are used.

Lay the gate down when this is done and measure the two diagonals from corner to corner: these figures should be equal when the gate is straight. There should be enough movement in the gate at this stage to allow you to move the shape until diagonals are equal. ➤





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STEP 7: CUT DIAGONAL TO LENGTH

Lay the long hazel pole diagonally across the gate. This will be used to make a cross-brace to give the gate more strength and rigidity. This pole will extend beyond the gate. Line up and saw at the appropriate angle so the end of the pole is flush with the inner edge of the battens at the top and bottom of the gate.

STEP 8: SCREW DIAGONAL IN PLACE

Use a 3mm drill bit to make a pilot hole in the centre of each end of the diagonal pole. Hold the pole in place and use a 5mm drill bit to make a clearance hole through the top and bottom battens. This hole will be at an angle, so point the drill bit in the direction of the centre of the pole. Use 5mm x 70mm screws to fix the diagonal.

STEP 9: SANDWICH TOP AND BOTTOM BATTENS TOGETHER

Now, use the 4mm drill to make three clearance holes in one of the unused pieces of batten. Space these near to each end and in the middle of each batten. Place this piece under the lower batten rail on the gate so the two battens are sandwiched together. Mark through the clearance holes and use the 3mm drill bit to make pilot holes in the lower batten. Use 4mm x 40mm screws to sandwich the two battens together at these three points.

Repeat this procedure with the remaining batten and the top rail of the gate, but this time screws go up from underneath the top rail. This means there are no screw-heads in the top of the finished gate and all screw-heads are protected from rain.

STEP 10: ATTACH HINGES TO GATE

Mark drilling points for hinges on the top and bottom rails of the gate. Use the 3mm bit to make pilot holes at these marked points. Screw hinges in place. Make sure they are straight and level.



8



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11

STEP 11: PROP GATE AT RIGHT HEIGHT

Prop the gate in position at the height that you want. Allow enough clearance underneath so it doesn't scrape when opened and shut. Eyeball everything at this stage so the gate looks straight. The hinges should lie against the post so they can be fixed in place.

STEP 12. FIX HINGES TO GATEPOST

Use the 3mm drill bit to make pilot holes and screw the hinges on to the fence post.

You can use a piece of scrap timber as packing between post and hinge if this is needed to level things up and make the gate hang straight. The gate should open and close smoothly.

Fit a catch where the gate closes, if needed. This can be a loop of wire that goes over the post, or a sliding catch that fits into a notch. Mine closes neatly and jams against a large stone. ■



12



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ALLOTMENT BOOM: WAITING FOR A PLOT

Does the allotment boom show any signs of slowing down and, if not, what impact is it having on allotment waiting lists? Gardening writer and keen veg grower **Steve Neal** investigates your chances of getting a plot



In 2010 London's Evening Standard reported a waiting list of 40 years for an allotment in Camden.

Despairing parents, planning for their children's future, had resorted to adding the names of their offspring to the waiting list, so they would have a chance of that precious inner-city plot in their lifetimes. Victoria Carr, 45, a potter and mother of three from Primrose Hill, had even considered adding any future grandchildren to the waiting list.

It made a good story. But what is the allotment state of affairs in Camden today? Well there isn't a waiting list. It's been closed. The allotment shop is shut to newcomers in search of a plot. You can't add your name to the waiting list for any of the four sites, for which the council's website apologises and suggests you contact neighbouring Brent if it's an allotment you're after.

MIXED PICTURE

Across the borough border the news is slightly different. Vanessa Hampton, food growing

and allotment officer for Brent Council, said: "The sites in Brent closest to inner London, i.e. in the south east of the borough, currently have closed waiting lists due to high demand." But the picture across the borough varies, for while the average time spent on the waiting list is 13 months, with some sites having waiting times exceeding five years, others have much shorter waiting times, perhaps a few months.

Outside the land-hungry capital the picture changes. In Norfolk, Sharon Clifton of West Norfolk Council said: "Demand for allotments in West Norfolk is constant and we receive around four or five requests each month. However, enquiries do tend to be seasonal. The average minimum waiting list is around three months. Gardening and food shows on the TV can influence demand.

"Some of the best-maintained and cultivated allotments in King's Lynn are managed by Eastern Europeans who relish the opportunity of growing their own fruit and veg. We know this from our annual allotment awards."



Allotments appeal to those with young families



Alistair Wood, Frome Allotment Association site manager. "Our successful new site has stimulated demand for allotments," he said



In Frome in Somerset, allotments are still as popular as ever, according to Frome Allotment Association site manager, Alistair Wood. "Three years ago we had a waiting list of 120 but we were lucky to open a new 100-plot site, which we quickly filled. But the success of the new site has stimulated demand for allotments. Our waiting list has gone back up to 90. We are noticing that people with young families are keen to take up plots and are encouraging children to take an interest in growing fruit and vegetables.

"In order to meet the demand, the plots on the new site are either 15x5 metres or 10x5 metres. We have also built raised beds so that less mobile gardeners can carry on growing."

THINGS HAVE CHANGED

In Bristol, Steve Clampin, senior allotments officer for the council, explained how things have changed in recent years. "There are just under 2000 applicants on our waiting list, so demand is still high. I believe that councils have, in general, become better at managing

and meeting demand for plots. The increased demand combined with financial pressures has meant we have become more businesslike in our approach. Reducing large plots into smaller sizes, for example, has helped to reduce waiting lists.

"Better enforcement against those whose plots are persistently overgrown or who do not pay their rent also means that unworked plots are made available more quickly, as there is pressure to ensure that plots are let and worked, to bring in rental income.

"Waiting lists for individual sites tend to go up and down, but the reality is that some sites remain extremely popular with high waiting lists, while others are less so. Sometimes these can be less than a mile from the more popular sites. There are often plots available if people are prepared to go to the less popular sites. They are still great sites, it's just they may not be right on their doorstep, or maybe they are less well known. It is also important to dispel the myth that all sites have long waiting lists, and that there is no point in trying to apply for a plot. This idea puts many people off applying." ➤

THE NATIONAL VIEW

The National Allotment Society (NSALG) believes that councils have become better at managing waiting lists, with many now using dedicated software to help them with this task. Parish and town councils are making efforts to create new sites in response to the demand from their residents, especially where there is new housing in the village.

Tony Heeson, Chairman of the National Allotment Society, said: "The Society believes allotments have now entered the national consciousness as part of our cultural heritage and a means to a healthier lifestyle. We suspect that the demand for allotments has stabilised and although we do expect future demand to fluctuate, due to influences such as popular culture, weather, economics and changing demographics, we anticipate it will remain steady over the coming years. Gardens have got very small, more of us are living in flats and as a consequence an allotment is the only way to grow your own food. Also, although allotments have become increasingly popular with younger people and families, we do have an ageing population for whom allotment holding is a fantastic way of staying active and socially engaged."



Tony Heeson of the NSALG



Steve Clampin, senior allotments officer, Bristol Council, said: "It is also important to dispel the myth that all sites have long waiting lists, and that there is no point in trying to apply for a plot. This idea puts many people off applying"

WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL US?

Collecting data on allotments to provide an accurate national picture is no easy task. There are privately owned allotments as well as those owned by different tiers of councils. In addition with more sites becoming self-managed the responsibility for the waiting list often passes from the council to an association. People adding their name to more than one waiting list further muddies the picture. Waiting lists need to be regularly "cleaned up" so they are up to date.

Transition Town West Kirby in conjunction with The National Allotment Society carried out a survey in 2013 by a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to the 323 principal English authorities. They reported that there was an average of 52 people waiting for every 100 plots.

Waiting list surveys in England	People waiting per 100 plots
1996	4
2009	49
2010	59
2011	57
2013	52

The report, Allotment Waiting Lists in England 2013, concludes that waiting list numbers are holding up. The slight fall in numbers is not statistically significant in view of the uncertainties around the collection of data.

It's also worth mentioning that from 2011-2013 the total number of new sites brought into use by 51 councils was 65. For the 58 sites where information was supplied, the total area of the new sites was 30 hectares, and the total number of new plots was 1950.

The available figures bear out the anecdotal picture – the allotment boom is still going strong. But what we need is more data so that we can gain a fuller understanding of the contribution that these valuable community assets make to the quality of life.



Award-winning allotment in West Norfolk



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION IS CRUCIAL

Allotments, it seems, are like houses in that location, location, location, is the crucial factor. The length of your wait depends on where you live and how far you are prepared to travel for an allotment. It's worth asking your local council allotment officer about availability over the wider area or approaching neighbouring councils if you live in a high demand area.

The allotment boom is still going strong, as more and more people want to grow their own veg and fruit, but with perseverance you should still be able to find a plot. ■



The urge to 'grow your own' is still as strong as ever in Britain



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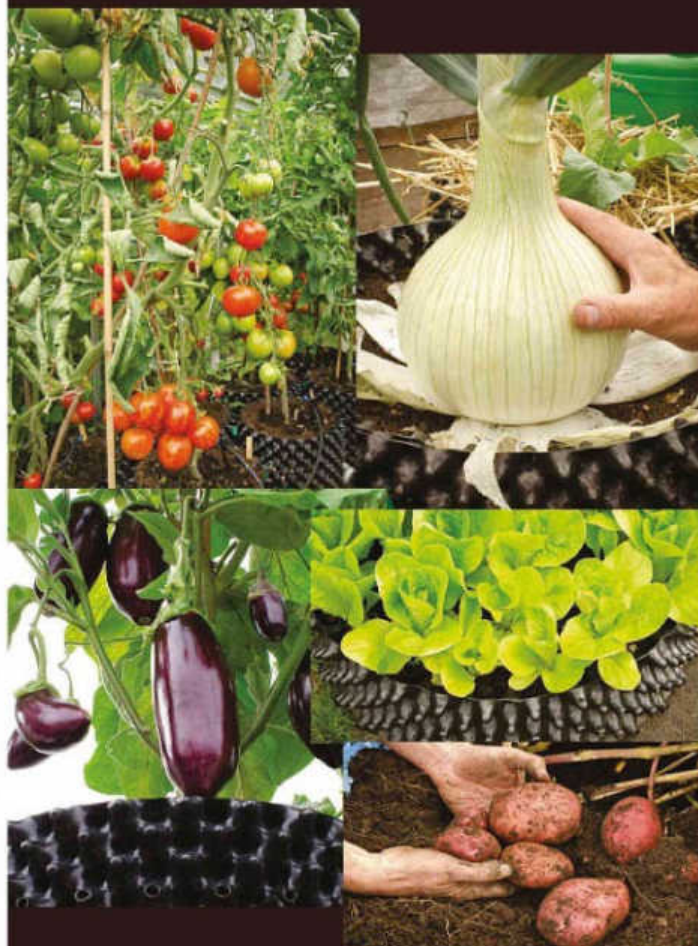
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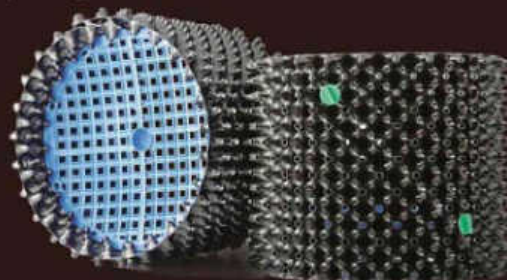
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Fruit at a glance

ALPINE STRAWBERRIES

Evocative of hot summer days, cultivated strawberries are a summer favourite for many. This month KG editor Steve Ott takes a look at an equally tasty, yet neglected cousin – the delicious wild or alpine strawberry



Sumptuous red strawberries picked warm from the plant are a summer delight that many of us look forward to. I love to grow a number of varieties in an attempt to extend the harvesting season for as long as possible. But some time ago I became hooked on another, equally delicious cousin of the modern hybrids, the alpine strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), also called the woodland or wild strawberry.

The fruit might be small in comparison with many of the modern cultivated giants, but once ripe it is packed with flavour and the plants go on fruiting for months on end. In fact I have picked fruit in varying quantities from June until the beginning of November from the same plants. This prolific habit does mean that the plants tire themselves out after a couple of years and have to be replaced, but are cheap and easy to propagate.

PROPAGATION

Alpine strawberries are usually propagated by seeds and these are sown from February to the end of April in a seed tray filled with multi-purpose or sowing compost. Place the tray in a heated propagator or on a heated mat/bench set to 21C (68F). Germination usually takes seven to 14 days.

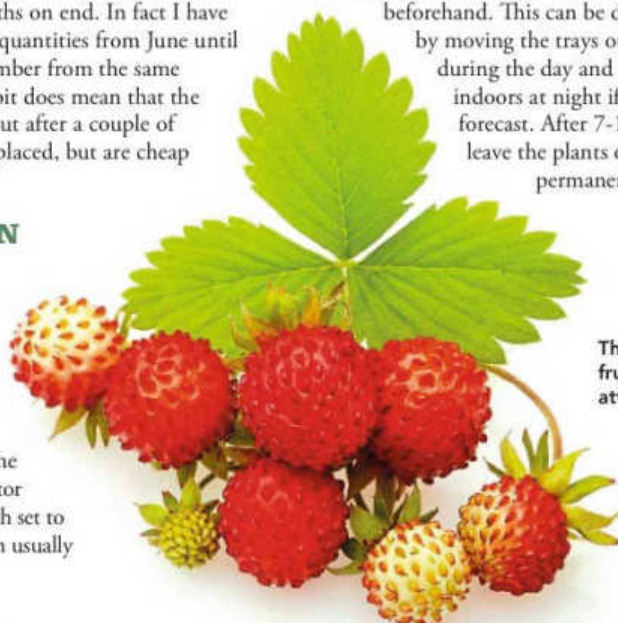
TOP TIP

Will tolerate full sun if kept moist or grown in moisture retentive soil

Some varieties also produce slender runners and these can be allowed to root or pinned to the soil or to the surface of the compost in pots as they appear. Once rooted they are removed from the parent plant and grown on.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR PLANTS

Once the seedlings are large enough to handle move on into individual pots or cells and grow on until the plants are large enough to plant out in May/June, hardening off thoroughly beforehand. This can be done by moving the trays outside during the day and back indoors at night if frosts are forecast. After 7-10 days leave the plants outside permanently. ➤



The dainty fruit are very attractive

GROWING IN POTS

Alpine strawberries also suit hanging baskets and patio containers perfectly so do try them there, planting three plants to a 45cm (18in) diameter basket.

Water regularly during dry spells and feed occasionally with a high potash feed. Avoid over feeding or high nitrogen feeds as plants will tend to produce lots of leaves and fewer fruit.



This is the perfect crop for containers



Move your young plants on into cell trays or small pots for growing on

WATCH OUT FOR

- Birds and squirrels do not seem to search out these little fruits as much as they do 'cultivated' types.
- Vine weevil adults and larvae will attack all types of strawberries, but again they don't seem to suffer in quite the same way as their cultivated cousins. The same applies to slugs and snails.
- Greenfly will infest the young growth at the centre of the plant and should be controlled with a suitable insecticide.



The plants are very attractive and good at suppressing weeds.

PLANTING

Plant in any reasonably fertile, well-drained soil in partial shade. These compact strawberries which grow into small, spreading clumps 25-30cm (10-12in) across are ideal as a productive edging for the vegetable garden and certainly attractive enough to be grown in the ornamental garden where the ferny leaves, white flowers and little red fruits look highly attractive. They also grow well around the base of trees and in a woodland setting.



Plants will go on cropping for months.

HARVESTING

The fruit are best harvested when fully ripe at which stage they have their best flavour. Harvest regularly to ensure a continued supply. Any which are missed will fall to the ground and it is common to find new plants popping up to replenish and add to the original planting. ■



The fruit is small, but flavour-packed when fully ripe.

TOP TIP

Look out for 'Fontaine' (*F. vesca* x *F. japonica*, the Japanese wild strawberry). The fruit is held on upright stems and it sends out runners freely making it great for pots and ground cover. You may find it in garden centres this summer

In the kitchen



Use the little fruit to scatter over cereals and desserts such as cheesecakes and ice creams. Also lovely when dropped into summer drinks and cocktails.

VARIETIES TO TRY

A few named varieties have been produced over the years and some novelties have sprung up naturally. Several seed catalogues list them.

■ **'MIGNONETTE'**: Elongated berries with almond undertones. (T&M)

■ **'REGINA'**: Rounded red berries. Highly aromatic. (Suttons)

■ **'GOLDEN ALEXANDRIA'**: Small rounded fruit and attractive golden yellow leaves. (Unwins)

■ **'RED & WHITE MIXED'**: A combination of red and white-fruited plants; described as super sweet. (Mr Fothergill's)

■ **ALPINE (FRAGARIA VESCA)**: The original wild strawberry. (Kings Seeds)



Photo: T&M



Photo: Suttons Seeds



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PATIO RASPBERRY 'RUBY BEAUTY'

At last a raspberry that is diminutive yet fruitful and anyone can grow it even in the smallest kitchen garden. KG's deputy editor, Emma Rawlings, grew it last year and here is her verdict



It is very exciting to see a launch of a new variety but to have one that is so different from anything else is a revelation. This fruit is described as the world's first compact raspberry and not having had a lot of room to squeeze raspberries on my plot I was keen to try this little fruit. 'Ruby Beauty' is also thornless and is said to grow to about 1m (3ft 3in) although mine probably fell short of that in its first season.

It is a multi-branching plant requiring no support although I imagine even at 1m or slightly taller it might benefit from some string around it in exposed gardens. It is a perfect size however for a container and I grew mine in an old florist bucket which are sometimes sold in local supermarkets. In hindsight this may have been too small (see my conclusions). It is recommended that if growing in a pot you put one plant in a 10-litre size pot or up to three in a 40-litre pot.

AS A HEDGE

Another recommendation is to grow this raspberry as a hedge, spacing the plants 70cm (27in) apart. I really like this idea and wonder if it would make a good edging on an allotment. My only concern is if they create runners and venture on to a neighbours plot!

THE RESULTS

In its first year I certainly did not get the 1.5kg (3lb) of fruit that the plant breeder – Hargreaves – suggests but I did get a good bowl full. My colleague found the same and has now planted his in the ground to see how it will perform. In hindsight I think we both probably used too small a pot. I did try and keep the plant well watered but there may have been times when it was not damp enough and this would have affected the yield. This would have been less of an issue with a big pot and more soil. I think planting in the open ground would produce the best results so grown as a hedge would be the perfect scenario but if this is not possible a large pot should give decent rewards. If growing in a pot make sure the compost is not allowed to dry out especially at flowering time. An occasional liquid feed may also help.

I can definitely recommend this variety for those who want to grow raspberries but don't have the room and the fruit tastes delicious and sweet.

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Stagnation reducing through-flow. Once full, your stored
rainwater is replenished with each new rainfall.

Fast Flow Drain Tubes. Quickly fill watering cans or buckets to use
both in your garden and for washing your car.

Water Level Indicators. See how much rainwater you have stored.

Expandable. Additional Rainwater Terraces can be linked to increase
your storage capacity.

Easy Assembly. The main parts fit together without tools.

Strong Parts. Made from high quality UV stable plastic.

Modular System. Rainwater Terrace is a total modular system
allowing the inlet and outlet pipes to be on the LHS or the RHS.



GREEN & BLACK



TERRACOTTA



DARK GREEN



BLACK



Packs down to less than
half its assembled size.

Contact us: 01937 845176 / rainwater-terrace@design4plastics.com

Multi-Award winning modular water butt



www.rainwater-terrace.com



PRODUCT REVIEWS

KNEE PADS & KNEELERS

If you're not careful, gardening can take a heavy toll on the old knees but fortunately there are lots of knee pads and kneelers on the market offering comfort and protection. This month the KG team got down on their knees for readers – literally – and tried out a range of products



GARDENER'S KNEE PADS

The soft padding has the addition of a hard knee cap for extra protection on jagged or stony surfaces. These knee pads have a Velcro closure for easy adjustment. Dimensions: (L) 9.7cm x (W) 8cm x (H) 24cm.

GREENHOUSE SENSATION

PRODUCT NUMBER: N/A

PRICE: £14.99

KG verdict

The soft padding made these comfortable to wear and the long Velcro straps made them easy to put on and take off. The bonus with these were the tough knee caps which gave excellent protection to the knees when working on hard ground or stony soil.





FUCHSIA KNEELO

Inside this kneeling cushion is a deep layer of shock-absorbing EVA foam and a cushioning layer of memory foam. The outer covering is waterproof and made from neoprene with a quick-dry, wipe-clean nylon coating.

BURGON & BALL

www.burgonandball.com

CATALOGUE CODE: GKN/FUCH

PRICE GUIDE: £14.95

KG verdict

There is plenty of cushioning in this attractive kneeler. The bottom layer inside the kneeler ensures that this is not too flimsy. The top layer provides a comfortable base for the knees.



FOLDING KNEELER AND SEAT

This acts as both a seat and kneeling pad. The frame is made from tubular iron and will take up to 19½ stones in weight. The plastic seat section measures 42cm wide x 22cm deep, with the foam kneeling pad 36cm wide and 18.5mm deep. It can be folded for storage.

HARROD HORTICULTURAL

www.harrodhorticultural.com

PRODUCT CODE: GCG-363

PRICE: £29.95

KG verdict

This is easy to put up and put away. The pad on the kneeler itself was comfortable on the knees. Great too for seated gardening. Strong and sturdy.



CHRYSANTHEMUM KNEELO KNEELER

This Kneelo has a layer of ultra-cushioning memory foam and a deep core of shock-absorbing EVA foam and has a waterproof, wipe-clean nylon cover. The chrysanthemum artwork is from the RHS Lindley Library.

RHS www.rhsshop.co.uk

PRODUCT CODE: BURGGRH/KNCHRYS

PRICE: £17.95

KG verdict

A very attractive kneeler with its chrysanthemum design. The cushioning is very robust and provides plenty of comfort for the knees. ➤





THE GRUFFALO GARDEN KNEELER

This padded garden kneeler is sized for little gardeners. The cover features a Gruffalo design with the text 'It's a gruffalo!'. The cushion has a waterproof base and a carry handle. Size: 32cm x 18cm.

GARDEN DIVAS

www.gardendivas.co.uk

PRODUCT CODE: N/A

PRICE: £8.99

KG verdict

A compact kneeler for little garden helpers. Plenty of cushion power, offering good protection for little knees. An appealing design too.



KNEELO KNEE PADS

These contoured knee pads have foam cushioning and a poppy-coloured cover. The pads have Velcro straps which attach at the back of the knees. Can be used for gardening and DIY activities where some cushioning for the knees would be beneficial.

THE ORGANIC GARDENING CATALOGUE

www.organiccatalogue.com

PRODUCT CODE: KNKP

PRICE: £14.95

KG verdict

These provided a comfortable fitting offering good protection. They were easy to get on and off with the Velcro straps allowing just the right amount of tautness around the knee.



HAWS LEATHER GARDEN KNEELING PAD

This leather and canvas kneeling pad is waterproof so can be wiped clean. It comes in a pink and floral pattern and has a carrying handle so it can be hung up when not being used. It is 44cm x 22cm in size and 5cm deep.

GARDEN4LESS

www.garden4less.co.uk

PRODUCT CODE: HAW105KF

PRICE: £27.50

KG verdict

A very stylishly designed kneeler, firm but soft. So not only is it a very attractive product but it also offers excellent comfort and protection.





Beetroot Rainbow Mix
250 seeds £1.99

Unsurprisingly Suttons...



SUTTONS
SEEDS
Est. 1806



As seed purveyors since 1806 it's no surprise we have all the gardener's favourite seeds, together with new and exclusive varieties just for our customers.

For a full range of seeds visit www.suttons.co.uk. Suttons are also available at independent garden centres and B&Q stores. View online for stockists.

GROWING GUIDES

WEBSITES & BLOGS FOR ALLOTMENT GARDENERS BY TONY FLANAGAN

ALL THINGS ASPARAGUS

www.asparagusrecipes.co.uk

Asparagus is delicious and is well worth the long-term investment if you're prepared to be a little patient and you have some space to give over to it. Although, on the face of it, this site might look like it's just about cooking asparagus – replete as it is with asparagus recipes – there's also lots more to interest the asparagus grower. One section of the site, Growing Asparagus, contains a range of articles dealing with such topics as asparagus varieties, diseases, harvesting and so on; another section, Learn About Asparagus, is more of a miscellany with a range of articles designed to expand your knowledge of asparagus. Visually well-organised and easy to navigate, this is a really good resource.



BERYL'S BLOG

www.mudandgluts.com

It's always fascinating to see what others are up to on their plots and Beryl Randall, who describes herself as "a seed-saving, mud wrangling allotmenteer, aspirant seed guardian and confirmed bookworm", is happy to show us. Blog entries are regular – every few days or so – and go back to 2013, so there is a fairly extensive archive. Blog headings are inventive ("The swede taste of success!") and the content delightfully ad hoc day-to-day stuff. As with all of us, Beryl's entries deal with successes and failures, trial and error and experimentation – for example, there's an interesting entry on overwintering tomatoes. This is an engaging blog and what a great name for a website too!



JOIN
THE FORUM
FUN ON OUR
WEBSITE

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

www.simplyseed.co.uk

SimplySeed is a family-run business which has been in the agriculture/horticulture industry for more than 50 years. The company produces more than one million plants each year at its nursery in Nottinghamshire from the same seeds that are supplied to customers. Distinctively, its seeds arrive in small, simple packages to avoid wastage, and the range of seeds available is ever-growing. SimplySeed also offers a loyalty scheme to customers which means that with each pound spent you earn 2p which can be redeemed against future purchases. As well as seed, the company also sells vouchers, gifts and gardening accessories.

CARROT CRAZY

<http://carrotmuseum.co.uk>

This may not be the most visually polished of sites but it is brimming with all things carrot, and just this side of zany. It claims to be "the first virtual museum in the world entirely devoted to the history, evolution, science, sociology and art of carrots," and there is no reason to doubt that. Its aim is "to educate, inform and amuse," and that it certainly does! The easiest way round the site is to take its virtual tour, floor plan dutifully supplied. Through this you can explore the museum's various 'rooms' and find out about the history of the carrot, its cultivation, its nutritional value, A-Z of varieties, recipes, the carrot in art and – somewhat of a surprise to say the least – the use of the carrot in contraception. Add fun, trivia and experiments for kids to this virtual edifice and you have a good day out...virtually.



CUTTING-EDGE TOOLS FROM JAPAN

Niwaki imports a wide range of high-quality gardening tools from Japan, including these sharp, robust Okatsune Secateurs (the model pictured is the standard size, which has an RRP of £36 plus £3 P&P), as well as other shears and pruners, weeding and digging tools, and the remarkable Niwaki Tripod Ladders.



**SAVE
10%**

Kitchen Garden readers can get 10% off the entire range at www.niwaki.com by entering the code 'kitchengarden' at the checkout. Offer valid until March 31, 2016.

SAVE AND PRESERVE

Extend your home-produced repertoire to include dried tomatoes, vegetable crisps, dried herbs, fruit leathers and dried ingredients for soups and casseroles. Leading American brand Excalibur produces a range of high-quality food dehydrators which let you preserve your crops naturally, concentrating their flavours and preserving their nutrients. Options range from a four-tray version (£149) through a nine-tray version (£249; pictured) to a state-of-the-art stainless steel model (£799). The Excalibur range is available from UK Juicers, which stocks products for a healthy lifestyle including dehydrators, juicers, blenders, sprouters and grain mills.

You can save 10% on any Excalibur dehydrator by quoting 'KGEX' when you buy online at www.ukjuicers.com/excalibur. Offer valid until March 31, 2016.



**SAVE
10%**

INSTANT SAVERS

GREAT PRODUCTS AT SUPER VALUE PRICES!

**SAVE
10%**



GET A GRIP!

Red Dot Award-winners for Product Design, Nordic Grip Non-Slip Boots feature patented IceLock electrostatic technology to offer six times more grip on icy surfaces. Micro-glass filaments that are electrostatically aligned in the boot's sole attract to the particles in the ice, creating a surface tension that improves traction and grip. Available in five colours (black, navy, olive green, coral and saffron yellow), Nordic Grips are waterproof, thermal-lined and easily slip on and off, making them a great choice for those who want to stay active and safe on their feet – whatever the weather.

Nordic Grips normally cost £44.95 (plus £3.95 P&P). To save 10%, quote 'KG10' when you buy online at www.cuckooland.com or by calling 01305 231231. Offer valid until March 31, 2016.

GIVE YOUR BARROW A BOOST

As seen on BBC TV's Dragon's Den, the Wheelbarrow Booster is the flagship product in the Grumpy Gardener range from GreanBase. With the ability to increase the capacity of any wheelbarrow by 300%, this simple and ingenious product will save you multiple trips when clearing your garden of leaves, grass or other waste. Positively reviewed by both Alan Titchmarsh and Diarmuid Gavin, this clever, lightweight product will save you time and effort and last for years.

The Wheelbarrow Booster normally costs £9.99 (plus £3.75 P&P), but you can save 20% by quoting 'KG20' when you order online at www.greanbase.co.uk or by calling 01604 530035. Offer valid until March 2, 2016.



**SAVE
20%**

GIVEAWAYS

WORTH
OVER
£2227

TO ENTER OUR GIVEAWAYS SEE PAGE 105 OR VISIT THE KG WEBSITE

GET SET FOR SHOW SEASON

Rated Britain's top gardening event by Which? Gardening, Harrogate Spring Flower Show runs from April 21 to 24 at the Great Yorkshire Showground. Featuring beautiful show gardens, over 100 plant nurseries, live entertainment

and the biggest exhibition by florists and flower arrangers in the country, it is the first major event in the gardening calendar.

New for 2016 is Botanica: Plants & People, exploring the ever-changing relationship between people, plants and the landscape through talks, displays, demonstrations and a

special exhibition celebrating landscape architect Capability Brown. Also new is a series of How2 demonstrations on garden upcycling. Horticulture On Trend will offer ideas on the latest in plants, colour schemes and garden features.

A packed programme of talks and demonstrations will include growing advice with Kitchen Garden Live, gardening chat in the Dig It Theatre and seasonal dishes in the Plot to Pot Cookery Theatre. Thousands of quality garden products, crafts and specialist foods all add to a great day out.

Tickets cost from £14 to £16 in advance and from £16.50 to £18.50 on the gate. Under-16s go free. Go to www.flowershow.org.uk or call the ticket hotline on 01423 546157.

We have 10 pairs of tickets, worth £37 per pair, to give away.



10
PAIRS OF
TICKETS
TO GIVE
AWAY



PLANTERS, POTS AND PROPAGATORS

Stewart Garden's grow-your-own products, pots, planters, watering equipment, propagators and garden accessories are available in more than 1600 outlets across the UK and Eire. They're made from high-quality plastics, so they're tough, durable and guaranteed to withstand frosts and ultraviolet rays – so propagators don't crack or perish and planters resist fading and look good for years.



We've got six prize packages to give away. One lucky winner will get a 52cm Thermostatic Control Electric Propagator (£54.99). A second will get the 38cm version of the propagator (£39.99).

Our third and fourth prizes consist of a 40cm Varese Low Planter (£19.99), a 35cm Varese Medium Planter (£24.99) and a 40cm Varese Tall Vase (£39.99), with one set of prizes in granite and the other in dark brown. The fifth prize is a 32cm Square Lead Effect Planter (£19.99), and our final winner will get a 44cm Round Lead Effect Planter (£24.99).

Stewart Garden products are available in garden centres and DIY stores.

For more information, visit www.stewart-garden.co.uk or call 0203 657 5230.

We have six prize packages worth a total of £309.90 to give away.



6
PRIZES
TO GIVE
AWAY



CROP PROTECTION TO FIT YOUR PLOT

Mainframe is a simple modular frame system enabling the construction of fruit cages, vegetable protection, pond covers, pet or chicken runs, and much more. Large frames are easy to build by joining standard tube lengths, while simply cutting the tubes with a hacksaw can make even the smallest of frames. Whatever size of plot you want to protect, Mainframe allows you to design and build a frame to fit.

The aluminium tubing can be connected together in virtually any configuration or size required, and with a range of UV-stabilised UPVC connectors, Mainframe is rust- and rot-proof, so your frame will last for many years.

You can buy the tubing, connectors and netting separately to create a frame to your particular requirements, or choose from the wide range of ready-to-assemble kits for

**6
TO GIVE
AWAY**



vegetable cages, soft fruit cages, strawberry cages and walk-in fruit cages. We've got six 4 by 4ft (121 by 121cm) Vegetable Cages, which are 3ft (91cm) high, to give away.

To find out more go to www.mainframedirect.co.uk or call 0117 9341 788.

We have six 4 by 4ft Vegetable Cages worth £39.99 to give away.

GO RED!

Swiss fruit breeder Lubera caused a sensation with the launch of its 'Redlove' apples in 2010. The original two varieties, 'Era' and 'Circe', are now firmly established, and Lubera has since introduced extra 'Redloves' to the family.

All of the 'Redlove' varieties are a beautiful deep rosy red, and this shows all the way



**17
TO GIVE
AWAY**

through the flesh, even when they are cooked. Their health benefits are exceptional because of the high levels of antioxidants found in the dark red skin and flesh – up

to 13 times higher than a normal red-skinned apple. The trees are resistant to both scab and mildew, and they also have very ornamental flowers, which are a fabulous deep pink.

The two most recent varieties are 'Calypso', the most aromatic of the range, and 'Odyssey', the sweetest. Both are ready for harvesting in September and October and will keep in good condition until Christmas. The fruits have dark red flesh which is very firm and juicy. Prices start at £17.40 for a one-year-old tree in a five-litre pot.

See Lubera's full range of top and soft fruit at www.lubera.co.uk

We have 17 'Redlove Calypso' apple trees worth £17.40 to give away.

SPRING LAWN REVIVAL



With wintry weather hopefully behind us, it's time to think about rejuvenating the lawn ready for summer. The key is to start with the soil, and Neudorff's Organic Lawn Feed & Improver contains a unique combination of soil-revitalising micro-organisms and mycorrhiza fungi. These encourage a thick, lush lawn

that is more resistant to drought and frost, with a root system up to 150 times bigger.

A compound fertiliser with an NPK ratio of 9:3:5, Organic Lawn Feed & Improver is fast-acting and continues to feed for up to 100 days. Available in a 2.5kg carton (£6.99) or a 5kg pouch (£12.49), it should be applied from March to June and from September to October.

**13
PRIZES
TO GIVE
AWAY**

Neudorff's Organic Moss Control for Lawns Concentrate

fights any moss build-up using a natural active ingredient, pelargonic acid, which guarantees fast visible results without harming the lawn. The biodegradable formula gets to work at low temperatures and once it is dry, pets can safely use the lawn. It comes in a one-litre bottle (£9.99).

For more information visit www.neudorff.co.uk



We have 13 prizes of a 5kg pouch of Organic Lawn Feed & Improver and a bottle of Organic Moss Control for Lawns, worth a total of £22.48, to give away.



**20
PAIRS
TO GIVE
AWAY**

HOMEBUILD SHOWCASE

The National Homebuilding & Renovating Show is gearing up for its flagship spring event with more than 450 exhibitors, 16 free seminars and 50 masterclasses. The show, sponsored by Velux, takes place at the NEC, Birmingham, from April 14 to 17.

Property specialists and TV personalities will be on hand to discuss building and renovating queries, and leading companies from industries ranging from architecture and design to finance and planning permission will be presenting their products and services.

In addition to free one-to-one advice, seminars and masterclasses, the event will introduce a series of immersive workshops on essential eco topics. Also debuting at the event will be The National Homebuilding & Renovating Show mobile app, which will help visitors personalise their day. Charlie Luxton, sustainable architectural designer and presenter of More 4's Building the Dream, Julia Kendall, interior design expert and co-presenter of ITV's Rebuild Our Home and a host of other leading property experts will be available for individual 15-minute consultations.

Tickets are £12 in advance or £18 on the door (under-16s go free). Visit www.homebuildingshow.co.uk/national or call the ticket hotline on 0844 854 0503.

We have 20 pairs of tickets, worth £36 per pair, to give away.





🔪 HAND TROWEL & FORK GIFT SET

This chrysanthemum trowel and fork set is made from carbon steel with FSC hardwood painted handles. The trowel is engraved with a gardening quote. Available in red or blue and presented in an illustrated gift box, it's a lovely present for Mother's Day.

PRICE: £19.95

www.greenhousesensation.co.uk

GARDEN STORE

OUR ROUNDUP OF THE LATEST PRODUCTS AND SERVICES FOR KITCHEN GARDENERS



☕ TO MUM WITH TEA

Gardening is thirsty work and there's always time for a refreshing cup of tea. This Silken Pyramids Gift Box – From The Heart combines four of Newby's most fragrant teas and tisanes in one package, including Strawberry & Mango, Hunan Green, Rooibos Orange and Jasmine Princess – 20 sachets of each.

PRICE: £20

www.newbyteas.co.uk



BAGS OF GOODNESS 🌱

The Westland Gardener's Range consists of three products: Multi-Purpose Compost, Seed & Potting-On Mix, Soil Conditioner – each in 50-litre bags – rich, dark and packed with ingredients. Get Mum's gardening off to a good start this year.

PRICE: RRP £5.99

(available from UK garden centres and retail outlets)
www.gardenhealth.com

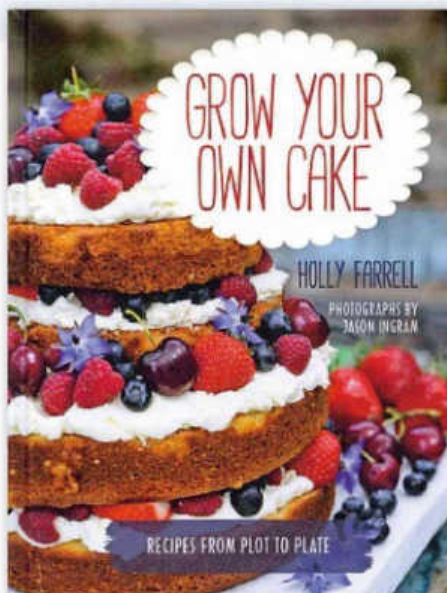


🌱 WINDOWSILL SOWING

Help Mum get her sowing season off to an early start with this Super 7 Electric Windowsill Propagator. It has seven mini vented propagators allowing the user to grow a wide range of plant varieties on just one unit. The heated base contains a 13W carbon fibre element for even heat distribution.

PRICE: £29.99

www.gardening-naturally.com



➤ GROW YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT TOO

Grow Your Own Cake by Holly Farrell contains lots of recipes covering all kinds of occasions – afternoon tea, birthday parties, holidays, festivals and with a special selection of savoury and wheat- or dairy-free dishes. Instructions first though on how to grow the ingredients. Great for mums who love growing and baking.

PRICE: £16.99
www.quartoknows.com



IT JUICES, IT STEAMS, IT COOKS! ➤

This Mehu Liisa Fruit & Veg Steamer consists of a three-sectioned set of stainless steel pots. It can be used for making juice, cordials, purees; for steaming and blanching vegetables; and for cooking meat, fish and a variety of puddings. Mums will love its versatility!

PRICE: £125
www.vigopresses.co.uk

GARDEN STORE



A GARDEN STEAL ➤

This Strawberry Thief Gardening Set consists of a toolbag, gardener's gloves, trowel and matching secateurs in the Strawberry Thief pattern by the 19th century textile designer William Morris. A stylish gift for Mother's Day.

PRICE: RRP £39.95
www.gardendivas.co.uk

RAISED PLANTERS

Growing vegetables doesn't have to be back-breaking for gardening mothers. These raised planters are made from home-grown timber and set high enough to prevent the user having to bend down. Suitable for a range of vegetables.

PRICE: FROM £132 + VAT
www.duchytimber.co.uk



➤ VEG GROWING ALL-IN-ONE

The Miracle-Gro Gro-ables Seed Pod comes with vegetable seed, compost and plant feed. All you need to do is tear off the lid, pop the pod into the soil or compost, add water and watch it grow. Six varieties are available and the pod contains everything a mum would need to start the growing adventure.



WATERING MADE EASY ➤

The Hozelock New Seasons Pico Reel & Gun is designed for patios, balconies and small garden spaces. It comes with winding handle, multi-spray gun, 10m of hose and weighs less than two bags of sugar. A real asset for gardening mums.

PRICE: £29.99
www.garden4less.co.uk



PRICE: RRP £1.99
(available from UK garden centres) www.lovethegarden.com



WOOD
BlocX

TRANSFORM YOUR GARDEN

RAISED BEDS, PLANTERS, PONDS & RETAINING WALLS

Whether you're looking to raise your flower and vegetable beds to a manageable height or you would like to add a stunning focal point, our easy to use BlocX slot together simply and quickly with dowels to make a variety of features for your garden.

There's no heavy lifting, drilling, screws or nails needed and the BlocX can be built on earth, grass or even hard surfaces like paving, concrete or tarmac.

Made from sustainably sourced timber and manufactured in the highlands of Scotland.

www.WoodBlocX.co.uk



Call us to order: Monday - Friday 9.00am - 5.00pm

FREEPHONE: 0800 389 1420

EMAIL US: admin@WoodBlocX.co.uk

Visit our new website to find details of all of our raised bed kits:

www.WoodBlocX.co.uk



20% off all Garden Cages
www.gardening-naturally.com

For a free catalogue please visit the website, call 0845 680 0296 or 01285 760 505

Offer Ends 29.02.2016

WIN A GREENHOUSE

Kitchen Garden has teamed up with Eden Greenhouses to offer readers the chance to win a revolutionary 4 x 6 Birdlip greenhouse in Mill Silver with toughened glass glazing. Worth £1000, the prize also includes a 6 blade louvre vent, integral staging and shelving and a water butt system, complete with gutter connecting kit.

WORTH
£1000

from
Eden
Greenhouses

For more information about the Birdlip and larger Eden greenhouse models visit www.edengreenhouses.com



It's always been difficult to find a small greenhouse which still has all the sophisticated features that keen gardeners need. Not any more!

Thanks to the new, award winning, Birdlip greenhouse from British manufacturer Eden, gardeners can now discover the potential of a clever greenhouse in a small space. Eden's compact Birdlip is a high-calibre model for urban gardens and those with limited outdoor space.

At around four foot wide, the Birdlip benefits from a build quality

that is usually associated with much larger greenhouses. It also boasts a range of game changing design breakthroughs which will transform greenhouse gardening, including the revolutionary Eden Zero Threshold™ Sliding Door System, which eliminates the trip hazard inherent in most greenhouse designs, making it ideal for able-bodied and wheelchair gardeners alike, as well as providing a useful solution for wheelbarrow and trolley access.

The no-trip door system combined with the addition of safety base corner covers ensures children a safe environment in which to learn about gardening, without the worry of grazed knees or ankles.

A whole host of other technical innovations ensures that users can make the most of the growing environment, growing vegetables and plants all year round. These include an increased volume of air from the high eaves design, providing an improved growing

environment with more room for plants and people. High capacity gutters increase rainwater capture, allowing for easier cleaning and leaf removal. The gutter design also prevents internal condensation drips and minimises the problem of unsightly algae forming on the glass.

Available in three sizes- 4 x 4, 4 x 6 and 4 x 8- the Eden Birdlip comes with a choice of glazing- 3mm horticultural glass, 3mm long pane toughened safety glass or 6mm polycarbonate.

**TO BE IN WITH A CHANCE OF WINNING, VISIT
WWW.KITCHENGARDEN.CO.UK & ENTER YOUR DETAILS ONLINE**

Terms and conditions apply. For full terms and conditions, please see www.kitchengarden.co.uk. The winner will be the first name drawn at random. There are no cash alternatives available. Closing date: April 7, 2016

READER OFFERS

EXCLUSIVE SAVINGS TO HELP MAKE YOUR MONEY GO FURTHER

SAVE
OVER
£14

FREE*
FOR EVERY READER

**ONE POTTED BLUEBERRY
'BLUECROP' PLUS 10 RUNNERS
OF STRAWBERRY 'ELSANTA'**

Get ready for next summer with this very special offer on two of our favourite and most versatile summer fruits.

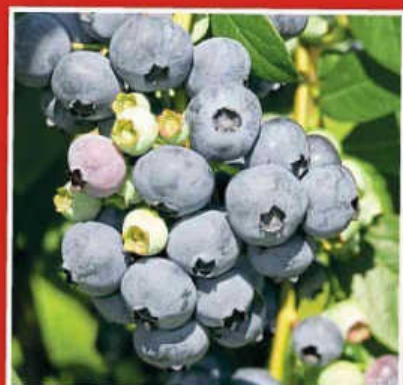
We're offering 10 runners of strawberry 'Elsanta' plus one potted blueberry 'Bluecrop' for FREE – just pay £5.95 p&p

■ **STRAWBERRY 'ELSANTA'** – popular in supermarkets and the most widely grown variety worldwide. It will crop heavily during June and July, producing large juicy berries with an excellent shelf-life.

■ **BLUEBERRY 'BLUECROP'** – The most widely grown blueberry variety for its reliable and high yields. An excellent mid-season variety with just enough tang to its flavour.



**WORTH
£20.90**



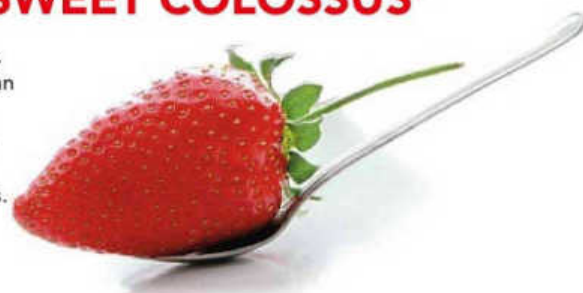
*JUST PAY £5.95 P&P

**ALSO IN THE KG
SHOP THIS MONTH**

STRAWBERRY 'SWEET COLOSSUS'

Gigantic fruits which are super-sweet. This super-sized variety weighs in at an impressive 43g but loses none of its sweet, juicy flavour. A novel addition to the fruit garden, this fast growing variety crops early from May onwards.

Buy 5 large plugs for just £9.95.



BLACKBERRY 'PRIME ARK'

A new release from the same breeders as the popular 'Reuben', this variety is proving popular with commercial growers. The large, sweet fruits are borne on plants with a more restrained habit so it is also a good choice for the home gardener. A primocane variety, expect fruits in the first season.

One potted plant for just £9.95



RASPBERRY 'BLACK JEWEL'

These fruits have a flavour and aroma that is totally unique to them. Expect crops from early summer which have set on the previous year's growth.

Three potted plants of the first true black raspberry!

for just £14.95



DIARY DATES

WHY NOT ENJOY A GARDENING SHOW, FESTIVAL OR ENROL ON A COURSE?

SHOWS AND OPEN DAYS

THE EDIBLE GARDEN SHOW

MARCH 11-13. Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire. Celebrity speakers, expert advice, plants, chickens and beekeeping.

www.theediblegardenshow.co.uk

JEKKA'S HERB FARM OPEN DAYS

APRIL 1-2, 29-30. Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane, Alveston, Bristol. Look round the herb garden, and buy herbs and seeds. 10am-4pm. 01454 418878

www.jekkasherbfarm.com

CORNWALL SPRING SHOW APRIL

2-3. Baconnoc House, Lostwithiel. Showcasing Cornish gardens and produce. 07734 366504

www.cornwallgardensociety.org.uk

RIVER COTTAGE GARDEN OPEN

DAY APRIL 4. River Cottage HQ, Park Farm, nr Axminster, Devon. Meet the experts, talks, Q&A, garden tours. 9.30am-4pm. 01297 630300 www.rivercottage.net

RHS CARDIFF FLOWER SHOW APRIL

15-17. Bute Park, Cardiff Castle. Show gardens, talks, stalls.

www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events

HARROGATE SPRING FLOWER

SHOW APRIL 21-24. Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate, North Yorkshire. 01423 546158

www.flowershow.org.uk

POWDERHAM CASTLE GARDEN

FESTIVAL APRIL 29-30. Powderham Castle, near Exeter, Devon. Hosted by Toby Buckland. 10am-5pm. www.tobygardenfest.co.uk



The Edible Garden Show this year is at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, covering grow-your-own, poultry, beekeeping and much more (March 11-13). Come along and meet the KG team

FRUIT PRUNING AND GRAFTING

APPLE GRAFTING WORKSHOP

MARCH 12. Acorn Bank, near Penrith, Cumbria. Graft your own tree. 10.30am-3.30pm.

Book on 01768 361893 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/acorn-bank

FRUIT GRAFTING FOR BEGINNERS

MARCH 15. RHS Garden Rosemoor, Great Torrington, Devon. Learn from the RHS's fruit garden expert. 11am-12.30pm or 2-3.30pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/rosemoor

VEG GROWING COURSES

BASICS OF VEGETABLE GROWING

MARCH 1. Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Tips for beginners. 10.30am-12.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

GROWING IN RAISED BEDS

MARCH 1. Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Bed construction and cultivation. 2-4pm. Book on 01572 813200

www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

MAD ABOUT CABBAGE MARCH 2.

Ryton Organic Gardens, Wolston Lane, near Coventry. Expert advice on growing brassica crops. 9.30am-1pm. Book on 02476 303517 www.gardenorganic.org.uk

THE VEGETABLE GARDEN IN SPRING MARCH 4 OR 5.

RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey. Practical day. 10.30am-4pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.co.uk/wisley

GROW YOUR OWN VEG MARCH

5. Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Workshop on all aspects of veg growing. 10.30am-3.30pm. 01844 339254 www.waterperrygardens.co.uk

NO-DIG VEG GROWING MARCH 5

OR APRIL 20. Alhampton, Shepton Mallet, Somerset. Course with Charles Dowding. 9.30am-4pm. Book on 01749 860292 www.charlesdowding.co.uk

THE KITCHEN GARDEN MARCH 5 & 6.

Barnsdale Garden. The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Theory and practical course. 10am-4pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC

VEGETABLE GROWING MARCH 7.

Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Theory and practical. 10am-4pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

INCREDIBLE EDIBLE PLANTS MARCH

8. RHS Centre, Pershore College, Worcestershire. Talk from Pennard Plants. 2-4pm. Book on 01386 554609 rhs@warwickshire.ac.uk

GROW YOUR OWN - SPRING

MARCH 16. Hyde Hall, Rettendon, Chelmsford, Essex. First of three seasonal GYO workshops. 11am-1pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

NEW IDEAS FOR VEG GROWING

MARCH 19. Waterperry Gardens, near Wheatley, Oxfordshire. Growing unusual crops and varieties. 10am-3.30pm. 01844 339254

www.waterperrygardens.co.uk

GET GROWING MARCH 20 OR APRIL

23. River Cottage HQ, Park Farm, nr Axminster, Devon. Get the most from your growing space. 10am-5pm. 01297 630300, www.rivercottage.net

VEGETABLES ALL YEAR ROUND

MARCH 21 OR APRIL 4. Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Make the most of your veg patch. 10am-4pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk



Advice on growing all brassicas from the experts at Garden Organic on a half-day course 'Mad about cabbage' (March 2)

PLEASE NOTE

We have made every effort to ensure these details were correct at the time of going to press, but recommend you check with the organisers before travelling



Waterperry Gardens in Oxfordshire – learn about all aspects of veg growing at their workshop (March 5)

HERBS AND FLOWERS

ESSENTIAL HERBS MARCH 18. Hyde Hall, Rettendon, Chelmsford, Essex. Ways of growing edible herbs in the garden. 10.30am-3pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/hyde-hall

THE CUTTING GARDEN MARCH

22. RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Harrogate, Yorkshire. Planning, growing and harvesting. 10am-4pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.org.uk/harlow-carr

GROW YOUR OWN CUT FLOWER PATCH APRIL 9. West Dean College, West Dean, Chichester, West Sussex. Planning and growing. 9.30am-3pm. Book on 01243 811301 www.westdean.org.uk

THE HERB GARDEN APRIL 13. RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Harrogate, Yorkshire. Propagation, cultivation and garden planning. 10am-4pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.org.uk/harlowcarr

HOW TO USE HERBS APRIL 16. Jekka's Herb Farm, Rose Cottage, Shellards Lane, Alveston, Bristol. Practical master class with Jekka McVicar. 10am-4pm. Book on 01454 418878 www.jekkasherbfarm.com

OTHER GROW-YOUR-OWN COURSES

THE PRODUCTIVE GREENHOUSE

MARCH 12. RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey. Growing salads, fruit and veg under cover in spring. 10am-1pm. Book on 020 317 65830 www.rhs.co.uk/wisley

COMPOSTING APRIL 14. Barnsdale Gardens, The Avenue, Exton, Oakham, Rutland. Materials, bins and methods. 10am-12.30pm. Book on 01572 813200 www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

SEED SWAPS AND POTATO DAYS

WESTON POTATO DAY MARCH 5.

All Saints Centre, Weston, Bath. Seed potatoes, seeds, onion sets, fruit. 10am-1pm. www.westonvillagegardeningclub.co.uk

DAMERHAM POTATO DAY MARCH

6. Damerham Village Hall, Fordingbridge, Hampshire. Seed potatoes, seeds, onion sets, fruit; organised by Damerham Horticultural Society. 10.30am-2.30pm. www.ddhs.co.uk

KNIGHTSHAYES SEED SWAP

MARCH 5. Knightshayes, near Tiverton, Devon. Support local and heritage vegetable varieties. 11am-2pm. 01884 254665 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/knightshayes

SEEDY SATURDAY CARMARTHEN

MARCH 5. St Peter's Hall, Nott Square, Carmarthen. Part of the town's Green Fayre. 10am-3pm. www.facebook.com/Seedy-Saturday-Carmarthen

KILMARTIN SEED SWAP MARCH 5. Kilmartin Museum, Argyll. 10am-4pm. www.kilmartin.org

GET SEEDY! MARCH 12. Conygre Hall, North Road, Tisbury, nr Bath. Seed swap, seed potatoes, talks. 10am-2pm. www.seedysaturday.org.uk

CONWY SEED FAIR APRIL 1. Conwy, North Wales. A 700-year-old street fair including seeds, plant stalls, home produce. 9am-4pm. www.conwybeekeepers.org.uk

LOSTWITHIEL GARDENERS' MARKET AND SEED SWAP APRIL 9. Lostwithiel Community Centre, Cornwall. 10.30am-1pm. www.transitionlostwithiel.org

KG MARCH GIVEAWAYS

Simply fill in the details below and return to us at: Kitchen Garden March-16 Giveaways, Mortons Media Group Ltd, PO Box 99, Horncastle, Lincolnshire LN9 6LZ. You can also enter online for free at: www.kitchengarden.co.uk
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To enter: Once you have supplied your details, cut out and send this coupon to the address above and you will automatically be entered into the following competitions:

- Get set for show season (p96) ✓
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GET COOKING

MARCH MAGIC

Rhubarb, cauliflower, and spring onions are Anna Pettigrew's choice veg for this month's delectable spread of enchanting dishes



Warming
and
delicious

RICE PUDDING WITH RHUBARB COMPOTE

This is a lovely dish to serve up after dinner, with seasonal tangy rhubarb and sweet rice pudding.

SERVES 4

FOR THE COMPOTE

- 3 large oranges, (zest of 1, juice of 3)
- 100g (3½oz) caster sugar
- 600g (1lb 3oz) rhubarb (trimmed weight), cut into 2.5cm (1in) pieces

FOR THE PUDDING

- 500ml (17fl oz) full-fat creamy milk
- 150ml (5fl oz) single or double cream
- 55g (2oz) caster sugar
- 100g (3½oz) short grain pudding rice
- ½ vanilla pod

1. For the rhubarb compote, put the orange juice, zest and sugar into a small pan and bring to the boil. Add the rhubarb and simmer gently for 5-7 minutes until just tender (it should still hold its shape).
2. Sieve the syrup, and place the rhubarb to one side. Return the syrup to the pan and boil until reduced slightly. Pour this back over the rhubarb and keep warm.
3. For the rice pudding, put the milk, cream, sugar and rice into a pan, bring to a gentle simmer.
4. Score the vanilla pod lengthways, scrape the seeds out, and add both seeds and pod to the pan.
5. Cook for 25-30 minutes, stirring regularly, making sure the mixture isn't sticking to the bottom of the pan. Once cooked the rice should be tender and the mixture thick and creamy. Remove from the heat, and leave covered for 5-10 minutes.
6. Divide the warm rice pudding among bowls and serve topped with the rhubarb compote.



AROMATIC CAULIFLOWER & CHICKPEA SALAD

A light salad of warm cauliflower and chickpeas coated in an inviting mix of spices. For a more filling dish, serve with couscous or hot pitta bread.

SERVES 4

- 1 head cauliflower broken into florets
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tsp fennel seeds
- 2 tsp cumin seed
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 tbsp golden raisins or regular raisins
- Small bunch parsley

1. Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6.
2. Toss the cauliflower, garlic, spices, 2 tbsp oil and some seasoning in a roasting tin, then roast for 20 minutes, tossing once to get an even roasting.
3. Add the chickpeas, raisins and remaining oil to the tin, then cook for 10 minutes more. To serve, stir in the parsley and season with salt and pepper. ➤



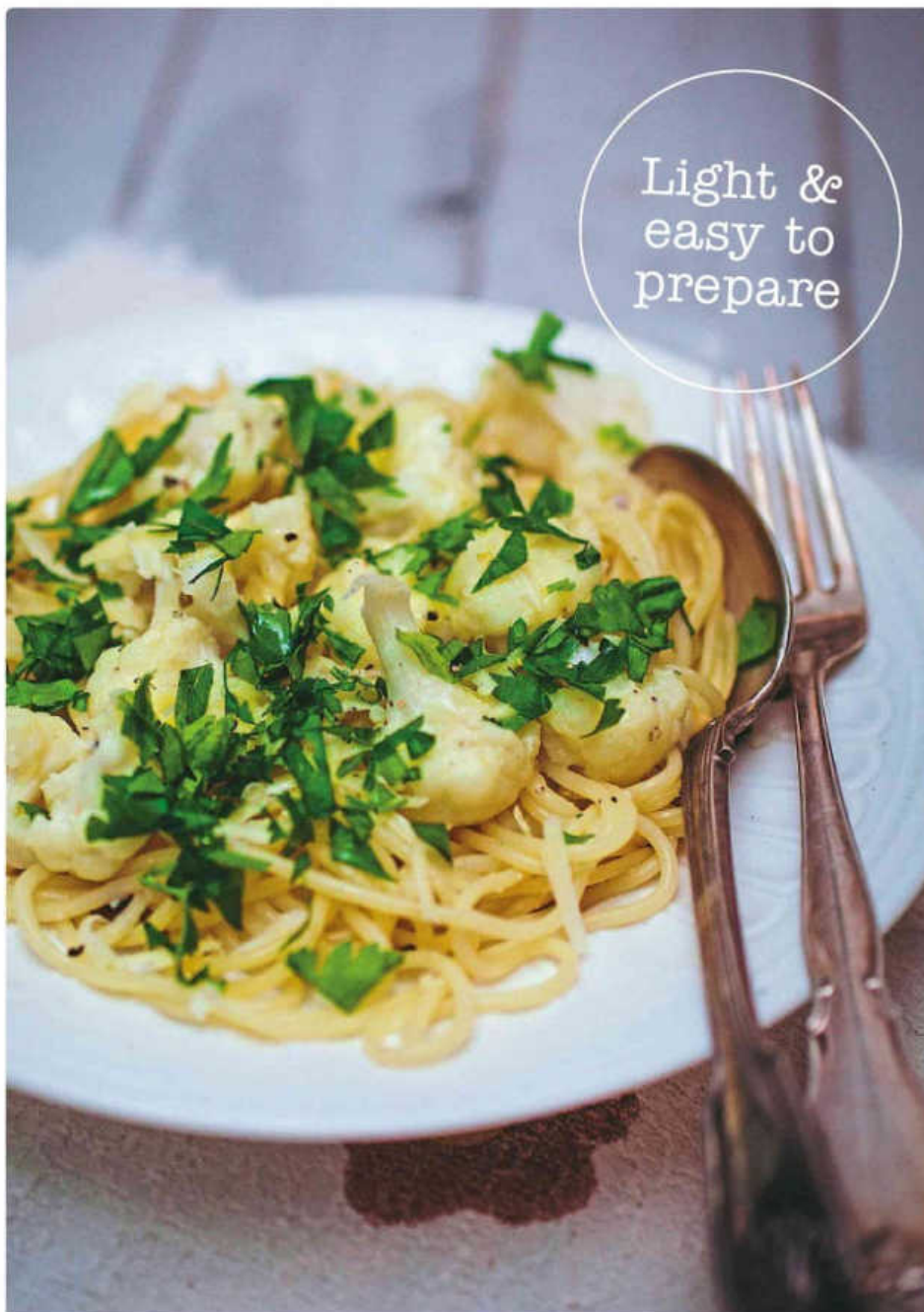
SPRING ONION FRITTATA

Frittatas are a firm favourite in my household. You can put practically any seasonal garden produce into the recipe and create a delicious, quick and easy dinner in 30 minutes. Try sweet potato and kale, or onion and tomato next time.

SERVES 4

- 500g (1lb 2oz) new potatoes, cooked and sliced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 handful spring onion, finely sliced
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp mint, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp parsley, roughly chopped
- 2 tbsp dill, roughly chopped
- 150g (5oz) peas
- 6 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 100g (4oz) feta, roughly crumbled
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. Heat the oil in a large (20cm/8in) deep frying pan. Add the cooked potato, fry until the potatoes start to take a little colour.
2. Add the spring onions and cook for 2-3 minutes.
3. Add the herbs, garlic, peas and half the feta to the pan. Pour over the eggs then scatter with the remaining feta. Season with salt and pepper and cook for five to seven minutes.
4. Transfer the frying pan to a hot oven at 200C/fan 180C/gas 6 and cook for 10-15 minutes until golden and cooked through.
5. Scatter with extra herbs and serve warm.



Light & easy to prepare

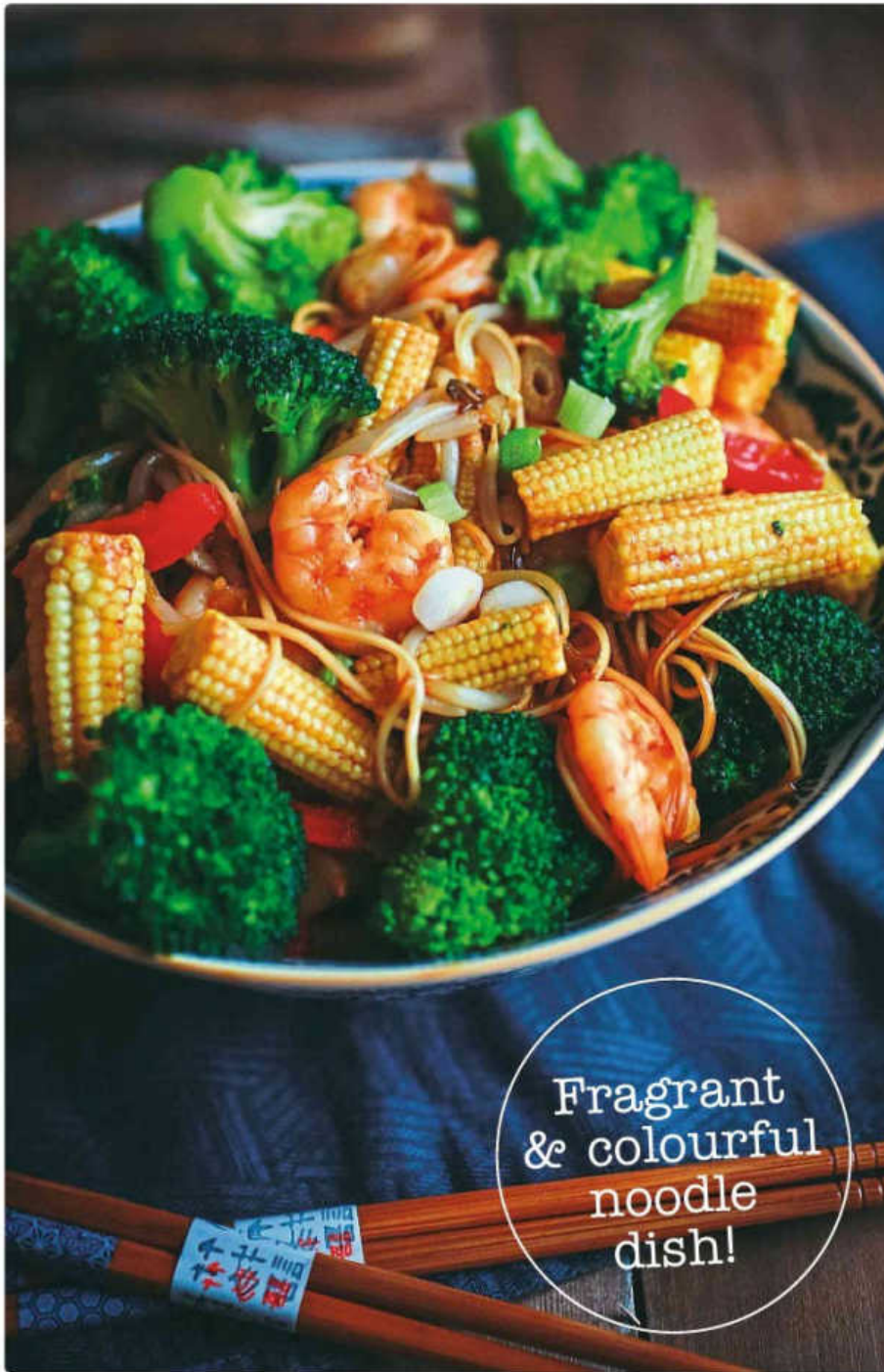
CAULIFLOWER & LEMONY SPAGHETTI WITH ANCHOVIES

A light and aromatic pasta dish which is full of texture and easy to prepare.

SERVES 4

- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 1 head cauliflower
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 8-10 anchovy fillets
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 packet spaghetti
- 1 small handful parsley, chopped
- ½ lemon, zest and juice of
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1. Bring a large pot of water to the boil.
2. In a frying pan, heat two tablespoons olive oil on medium-high heat, then add the onion, and sweat for four to five minutes.
3. Next add the cauliflower and cook for two minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Reduce heat to medium and add the anchovies, garlic, lemon juice and zest. Continue to cook for two to three minutes or until fragrant, stirring to break up anchovies into small pieces.
5. Meanwhile, add the spaghetti to the boiling water, and cook until al dente. Reserve one cup pasta cooking water. Drain pasta and set aside.
6. Add the cooking water to the cauliflower mixture, bring to a simmer, cook until the liquid has reduced a little.
7. Add the pasta to the pan, and mix through. Season with salt and pepper, sprinkle on the parsley and drizzle the remaining oil over. Serve immediately.



Fragrant
& colourful
noodle
dish!

PRAWN & SPRING ONION CHOW MEIN

Have an oriental-inspired dinner with this fragrant and colourful noodle dish.

SERVES 4

- 3 nests fine egg noodles
- 1 small bunch spring onions
- 100g (3½oz) bean sprouts
- 140g (5oz) broccoli, chopped into small florets
- 140g (5oz) baby corn, halved
- 2 tbsp olive oil or sesame oil
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- ½ red chilli, sliced
- 300g (11oz) peeled, raw king prawns
- 3 tbsp dark soy sauce
- 2 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds

1. Cook the noodles following pack instructions, then rinse with cold water and drain. Toss with one teaspoon of the oil.
2. Heat one tablespoon of oil in a wok. Stir-fry the spring onions, broccoli, baby corn, bell pepper and the bean sprouts for a couple of minutes until tender. Tip out of the wok and set aside.
3. Wipe out the wok and add the remaining oil. Add the prawns and chilli and stir-fry for a couple of minutes until the prawns have just turned pink. Stir in the sugar, soy and oyster sauce, then simmer until the sugar has melted and prawns are cooked through. Add the noodles to the wok and mix through. Add in the cooked vegetables and mix.
4. Serve immediately with a scattering of sesame seeds.



RHUBARB & BUTTERMILK SCONES

These light delicious scones are great served still warm.

MAKES 8

- 175g (6oz) self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 50g (1oz) butter
- 50g (2oz) sugar
- 1 stick rhubarb, cut into 1cm pieces.
- 125g (4oz) oats
- 150g (5fl oz) buttermilk
- 1 egg

1. Preheat oven to 220C/200 fan/gas 6
2. Sift flour and baking powder into a bowl, then rub in butter, until mixture resembles breadcrumbs.
3. Stir in the sugar and rhubarb.
4. Beat the egg with the buttermilk, then add to the mixing bowl, mix together until you have a soft dough.
5. Tip dough out on to a floured work surface, and form a 2cm (1in) thick round.
6. Cut the round into 8 triangles, and place on a baking tray.
7. Bake in oven for 10-12 minutes. ■

JOKING APART

How do you know
if a snail is lying?
When he tells you he
is not at home!



Why did the tomato
get embarrassed?
Because he saw the
chick pea!

"All for
onions and
onions for
all"

Illustrations: Let's Face It



On the plot with the 3 Mudketeers

The KG team offer chat,
tips and gardening gossip

POTATO CHALLENGE

We thought we would have a bit of fun and each grow a single potato tuber (variety – 'Foremost') in a different container and see which performs the best. Pictured far right is editor Steve Ott with his large plastic pot. In the centre Emma Rawlings is using a proprietary potato bag, the type exhibitors



often used to grow spuds in. (Thompson & Morgan 5x8litre bag £5.99 www.thompson-morgan.com). Tony Flanagan on the left is using an unusual Air-Pot (www.air-pot.com). Originally

designed for the nursery stock industry but now available to gardeners the unique design of this pot creates air pruning of the roots which encourages multiple branching of the root system and therefore better water and nutrient uptake giving a stronger, better plant. But how will it do for potato growing? We will be revealing the results later in the year.

MAD HATTERS

As you may know, mudketeers like nothing more than a good hat, so how about this picture sent in to us recently? A garden hat... literally. So what hat do you wear when plotting? Straw hat, flat cap, bobble hat or boater? Send in your pics and share the love.



Picture: Orticolario www.orticolario.it

This year ...

TONY IS DICING WITH DEATH?

"If you think the Grim Reaper is someone to worry you, how about the 'Carolina Reaper', the world's hottest chilli? I'm afraid curiosity has got the better of prudence this time and the seeds, along with other weird and wonderful varieties, are in! These include 'Prairie Fire', 'Black Hungarian', 'Bhut Jolokia', 'Pasilla Bajio' and 'Monkey Face' (I wonder if this one will live up to its name?)."



STEVE IS GOING TO REPLACE THE COVER ON HIS POLYTUNNEL

"My polytunnel came with me when I moved house 15 years ago and the cover hasn't been changed since; it has survived incredibly well! In fact the polythene isn't too bad, it is really the wooden doorframe and battens that have given up the ghost – but they are probably 20 years old. I wouldn't be without it for spring sowings, salads and tender summer crops. I also have a grapevine 'Black Hamburg' growing inside with roots planted outside. The rain running from the cover makes it thrive."



EMMA IS GOING TO PLANT ALPINE STRAWBERRIES

"I intend to line a shadier edge of the plot with some containers filled with different types and varieties of alpine strawberry (see page 84). I am sowing the seeds now including a musk strawberry (*Fragaria moschata*) which has a taste likened to strawberries (really!) but also raspberry and pineapple. My intention is to grow them in raised tiers of rings made of plastic to create a 'stack' of plants and this should bring the fruit a bit higher off the ground for ease of picking."



DON'T FORGET TO LET US KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO ON YOUR PLOT. EMAIL TFLANAGAN@MORTONS.CO.UK

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LAST WORD



Giant plastic pot which I 'aged' with watered-down emulsion.

It was a single bite from a home-grown tomato that set KG reader **Angela Magee** on the path to growing her own veg

I grew fruit and vegetables in my garden last year for the first time, and can remember the exact moment I decided to. It was early May Bank Holiday Monday and I was at home eating a bland, supermarket tomato, when I suddenly had a vivid flashback to a moment many years ago.

I had been enjoying a summer's lunch with my old friend Ralph in his garden, when he reached over to pick a plump red tomato from the vine and handed it to me. "Taste one of these," he said. "But, be warned, you'll never enjoy a supermarket tomato again." And when that sweet, warm, sun-ripened fruit exploded in my mouth, I knew he was right!

The memory of eating that sublime tomato was an epiphany of sorts, because the very same day I bought three small plants – two 'Moneymakers' and one 'Gardeners' Delight', a growing bag, some canes and cane frames. I set the bag against a south-facing wall in my garden and my adventure began.

Buoyed on by the idea of growing tomatoes, I immediately set about filling my small patio with my other favourite vegetables and fruit.

To make the area beautiful as well as functional, I added flowers for colour, with lavender to confuse the aphids. I used all sorts of recycled containers and to keep everything affordable I 'aged' huge £3 plastic pots with watered-down paint to help them blend in with my old terracotta pots. A rusty broken bike got a makeover and a basket of pretty white flowers. Rustic plant pots overflowing with red geraniums sat on an old bench, which I painted in a cheerful cornflower blue.



I had very low expectations of any success at all – after all, I was a complete novice. But when seeds actually started to sprout, it felt I was witnessing a series of tiny miracles right before my eyes.

Each morning I'd check the seedlings on the windowsills and wander out into the garden in my dressing gown to keep up with progress, before I'd even had my cup of coffee!

Up until this point in my life I admit I was shockingly wasteful. I routinely forgot about the vegetables at the back of my fridge and the fruit in my bowl, and would casually chuck most of them away each week.

Today I'm a reformed woman. Last summer, our meals were shaped by what was ripe or ready to pick.

I feel a connection with this food that I've never felt before. A weird-shaped carrot is now a thing of beauty. My baby beetroot were a joy, roasted in olive oil and served with a splash of balsamic vinegar and some salt flakes. The

first tiny potatoes, steamed and tossed in butter and mint, were good enough to eat by themselves. And as for my first ripe tomato? Well it was every bit as sweet and delicious as I'd hoped it would be.

As for the future? I am planning more raised beds, a little greenhouse for the garden and have a list as long as my arm of additional vegetables I plan to grow.

At the age of 50, after working in office jobs for most of my adult life, I've just started an HND in horticulture course and plan to say goodbye to the rat race for good. And I have that single sweet tomato to thank for it all. ■

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